



The CIRCLE

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The CIRCLE, financed by Auburn University student activity fees, serves as a forum for the writers and artists within the university community. It aims to appeal to a diverse Auburn audience by providing a variety of articles, essays, short stories, poetry, art, and photography. The views expressed throughout the issue are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the publisher (the Board of Student Communications), *The CIRCLE* Editorial Board and Staff, Auburn University, its administration, student body, or Board of Trustees.

COVER: white charcoal drawing by Steve Hubbs

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Peach Cobbler

By Scott Smith

Watching the blur of the land out the passenger window, I first notice the trees. Their black, hysterical limbs fly past my face, forcing my eyes to constantly readjust to the evening sun. It isn't a warm sunset of brilliance and comfort; instead, it is one of those winter sunsets that leaves the sky depressingly grey, a reminder of spring's distance. At times like these the memories rise up from the stubble fields rolling past my window, bombarding me with scenes from the past as vivid as the moment.

Memory blurs the interior of my brother's Honda and places me in the driver's seat of my Volkswagen. Speeding down a narrow country lane, flying in and out of the patches of shade cast upon it by the ancient southern oaks, I feel the solitary power of the car and the freedom of those roads. Devoid of speed limit signs and passing lines, the road's only guides are the thousands of patches on the edge of the asphalt which quickly warn of the shoulder's presence. I can feel the early afternoon sun on my arm and the wind in my hair as the white blurs of chicken houses blow past. My chest begins to tighten and my breathing quickens as the road twists downhill toward the river with its rich scent and shimmering summer surface. Pushing my car as fast as it will go, I fly into the familiar gravel driveway of my grandparents, sending squirrels and robins into the shrubbery. Grandmother and Granddaddy are there, the same as always, sitting on the front porch waiting eagerly for the crunch of my tires on the gravel.

* * *

This was one of the few constants of my youth: my grandparents were always glad to see me. It did not matter whether I had killed the dog the day before or if I had made good grades that six-weeks, they would always be sitting in those same rickety green wire-mesh rocking chairs, smiling. Their love never faltered and never asked questions. Only with time's passage have I come to appreciate its purity.

My grandparents' one-story brick house sat on the shore of Lake Guntersville. I remember the smell of summer sun baking the red bricks of their house mixed with the aroma of freshly mown grass. These two smells—one

subtle, one strong—always hung in the air as I walked up to their porch. That's another thing. I can't recall ever going to their house before they mowed the grass. It was as if they intuitively knew I was coming, so they spruced the place up for me. I guess that's something only grandparents understand. Anyway, they were there in my memories, leading me in to their house to sit in the living room and watch the lake as we caught up on the family, friends, and me.

Those trips to the lake were always an escape for me, an oasis from the frustrations of life and the wounds of home. I could always depend on Grandmother to fill my stomach with her simple cooking and provide silent comfort when needed. I never doubted for a moment how much that gentle old woman loved me. It was in the azure brilliance of her eyes but more particularly in her veined and wrinkled hands. Her hands were soft as leather gloves broken from wear. I remember sitting on her lap in the brown La-Z-Boy recliner, spending the afternoon with the cast of *Days of Our Lives* and *All My Children*. I can hear the resonant voice of Macdonald Carey say, "Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives," just before the whine of violins began. Grandmother called soap operas her "shows." I never got into the stories, like she did; I enjoyed the attention she gave me. Like I said, she had the softest hands in the world, and she would barely touch the skin of my stomach and it would quiver and jump like a bream in the bottom of the boat. It felt so good I never could tell her to stop, no matter how much I wanted to. Instead, I would endure that wonderful torture until either she decided to play with my curls or the latest news flash caught her attention. What a way to spend a lazy afternoon.

Her hands always seemed to affect my life. Whether it was the reminder of their presence on sheets turned down for me, or their caress when I cried the tears of experience, they were always there, softly touching my life. I remember her hands rubbing Johnson & Johnson's Baby Shampoo in my hair, even when I was old enough to do it myself. Besides, it was the only chance I got to sit in the tub with the raised pink flowers on the bottom that kept you from falling down. Her hands were also there to calm. After I fell and cracked my head open, her hands gently stroked my hair, easing my mind while

she stared out the car window, avoiding the sight of blood on her hands. Rushing to the hospital, I could feel my liquid warmth soaking her dress, but somehow her hands kept me calm. They were the hands of patience and the hands of comfort; I will never forget those wrinkled hands.

The memories become thicker as I sit and contemplate the years of my youth. As the evening sky turns from white to the somber grey of winter, the past becomes vivid, and images long forgotten come to mind.

I remember going to sleep in my grandparents' house, the night before Granddaddy and I were supposed to go fishing. I would sit up and listen to the sounds of a St. Louis Cardinal's game on my grandmother's wood-cabinet Realistic radio. She always listened to KMOX when she went to sleep. I doubt she ever made it past the fourth inning, but somehow she always knew who won. I would lie there in the darkness and run my fingers over the knots on the white chenille bedspread, scared of the two-headed lamp which my imagination had turned into a monster. I would eventually fall asleep and dream of the abundant catch in tomorrow's water.

"This is the taste of summer nights in my memory; a mixture of cold vanilla and the heavenly heat of Grandmother's peach cobbler."

Grandmother could wake me with a touch on those mornings. I would leap out of bed and dress in seconds, cap on and pole in hand. After we returned from those mornings on the lake, Grandmother would always have a huge breakfast on the table. Eggs fried in the sausage grease, those little flour-dusted biscuits, her homemade applesauce, and a big glass of whole milk. That is what breakfast was meant to be. I would eat biscuits with applesauce until I burped. She would scold me with a glimmer in her eye and then pat my butt, sending me to the living room for a nap on the couch we nicknamed "the Sleeping Pill."

Our days together were filled with stories told over iced tea and the heat of the patio. My favorite story was her reminiscences of how she and Granddaddy met and fell in love. I guess this love story never lost its significance to me, for it brought to mind images of my grandparents in their youth; a youth which lived in her heart and in yellowed pictures in a photo album. From these pictures I could recreate their active faces, absent of familiar wrinkles, and I would imagine their courtship.

They met in Panama City. Granddaddy had fallen asleep on a sailboat the day before, and was as red as a stop sign when he swaggered up to meet his future wife. She said he was so cute in his white suit, crew cut, and glowing face. He followed her and her girlfriends to the gritty coast dive where they ate that night, figuring he could be suave and just happen to run into them. Of course she knew exactly what he was up to and began flirting back. From there they spent a couple of late nights in the wash of moonlight and waves, sand between their toes and warmth

in their hearts. After that she went home, missing him dearly and suspecting she would never hear from him again. Well, she did. He took the train to Birmingham every weekend that fall, and eventually they decided to marry. That story remains as the most romantic story in my mind. The white suits, the sweaty palms, the smiles, the laughter, and the stirrings of love in the beach's various lights are things each couple should share.

I also remember summer nights sitting around the card table after a huge meal of fresh bream, hush puppies, and slaw. We would pass the time away playing gin until our supper settled. It seems like Grandmother always won. I think sometimes she would throw away some of her good cards to spare the masculine pride of her opponents. After she whipped us in six or seven games, she would go in the kitchen to pull her peach cobbler out of the oven. I could smell it from a mile away, and it always looked too immaculate to ruin with the serving spoon. Those strips of crust on the top were as light and flaky as the Crisco commercials promised. The juice would bubble up to the top, and I would immediately forget how much I had eaten an hour earlier. She would spoon out a healthy portion for everyone but herself, and then she would put a heaping spoonful of Meadow Gold French Vanilla on top. I always tried to finish mine before the ice cream melted, and I usually did. This is the taste of summer nights in my memory: a mixture of cold vanilla and the heavenly heat of Grandmother's peach cobbler.

I can picture Grandmother kicked back in her La-Z-Boy recliner, feet up, eyes closed, and mouth wide open, while her snores added a peculiar harmony to the "Happy Days" theme song. I can also hear her say "Dammit, Al" when he would spill something on the rug. I can smell her hair, and I can hear her cute "Hee, Hee, Hee" laugh. That old rusty sign on the boathouse still hangs in my thoughts, a reminder of their touching humility: "Here 'Tis, 'Tain't Much! . . . Al and Dot Smith." I wonder where they bought that sign—probably in Panama City or somewhere similar. I remember the white Kenmore refrigerator in her kitchen. They had the biggest ice cubes in the world, and I swear they tasted better than the Coke I poured over them. I would fill my glass full of ice cubes and go down to the dock, plop my feet in the water, and crunch them as loud as I could, mouth open and all.

I used to sit in her kitchen on the tile floor and spin the lazy susan in her cupboard for hours, watching the Quaker Oatmeal man and the tin flour sifters spin past my eyes. Last summer we spent some great times in that kitchen. Her hands, withered and bent by the torture of arthritis, needed the help of my youth to prepare her annual plum jelly. Of course I messed everything up, but with her standing over my shoulder to provide correction and encouragement, it actually turned out rather well. I think there is one jar of that batch left on top of my refrigerator at school.

She used to always give me money on my birthday and tell me to spend it on something I wanted, not on something I needed, like underwear. I can hear her say,

"Why don't cha take that pretty little girl you're seein' out to dinner, or something like that." I loved her for little things like that; she always looked out for my happiness and reminded me of the value in simple pleasures.

I also loved the stories she would tell about the funny things we did as children. One of my favorites was the one she would tell about me and my big mouth. One time she told me to shut up, and I turned around in my childish arrogance and retorted that I couldn't because my mouth was filled with so many words, they just had to come out. She always told that story when I would bring friends over to visit, as if to point out how little I had changed.

Leaving their house always brought a lump to my throat. It was a feeling called forth by the dread of school and the harsh realities of home. As I pulled out of their driveway, they would be sitting in those same old green mesh rocking chairs, waving and saying goodbye. Grandmother would always blow me a kiss from her palm right before I would turn my head to drive away. I can still see her hand up in the air with her lips puckered in a timeless telegraph.

* * *

My mind returns regretfully to the present. I sink limply into the passenger seat of my brother's car as he silently steers us back to school. In the rushing darkness, the sorrows of the weekend envelop me like a horrible glove which strangles the soul.

It was one of those dreadful weekends of death; a time of emotions withheld in the midst of starched shirts, striped polyester ties, fake smiles, old people, Kleenex, and deli plates. At the funeral home I fought against the reality of my grandmother's death. I couldn't stomach the plasticity of her face against the pure satin of the coffin, so I waited outside the parlor. I wanted to only remember her living visage, a face characterized by the wrinkles of laughter and the scars of loving concern during the war. This was the face which I would eventually long to

recapture for a moment of comfort in the midst of confusion and loneliness.

The funeral was typically insignificant in comparison to her life. The grey sunshine and biting cold of that January day brought the emptiness of death to bear on my thoughts and soul. The usual tears of frustration and misunderstanding were cried on the shoulders of my sister and mother, while the men stood around shuffling in discomfort. My brother, Drew, and I were pall bearers, and as we carried the coffin to the graveside, her weight in my hands seemed ironic to me. I never thought I could even begin to carry this woman who had supported me my whole life. She was always so strong, yet the cold, metallic bar in my palm confirmed the unforeseen.

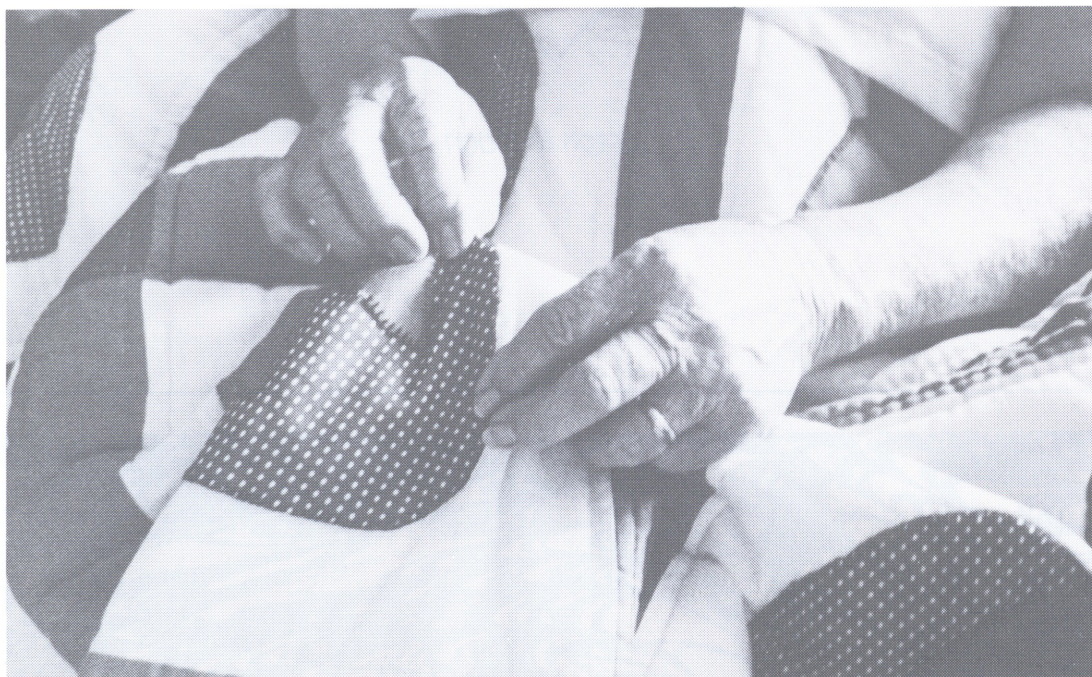
Driving through these miles which lead back to Auburn, I realize I am left with only sensations and memories. I will always treasure the times we spent together, yet an irrepressible regret haunts me. I knew this wonderful woman for merely a short time, and yet she touched my life with a love which was pure in its simplicity. What if I had known her as a person instead of a grandparent? Why didn't I make the effort to discover who she was? I was so immature and selfish, I missed the chance to understand her hopes, dreams, and emotions. Lost opportunity is the pain of death; it is the helplessness of one caught in the rush of time.

My stomach ached because I doubt I will ever know a love as sublime and rich as Grandmother's was for me. Her love was the type found only in childhood innocence, and now that my heart has been hardened by experience, I fear I will never trust another as much as I trusted her. I can only pray my hands will one day contain the ghostly traces of her gentle touch, and then I will catch a glimpse of who she truly was.

Emotion overwhelms me, and the headlights in the darkness begin to expand and blur. I am losing control. A solitary tear tumbles down my cheek as I try to swallow past the pain. Cautiously, I reach over and squeeze my brother's hand.



Mike Goodson



AN OLD FRIEND

I
Saw him
Just a few
Days ago, at
The home of a friend
Of a friend of a friend.
His eyes lit up at the sight
Of an old and faithful face.
He passed me a bowl (without a light),
The ghost of a skinny boy who would chase
Squirrels up a tree, with one stone hurl
A perfect shot. In any case,
The image passed, a smile curled
My lips. I remembered
That cool November
Day, and I said,
"Hey man, good
To see
You."

Joseph Brandon



Neel Heisel

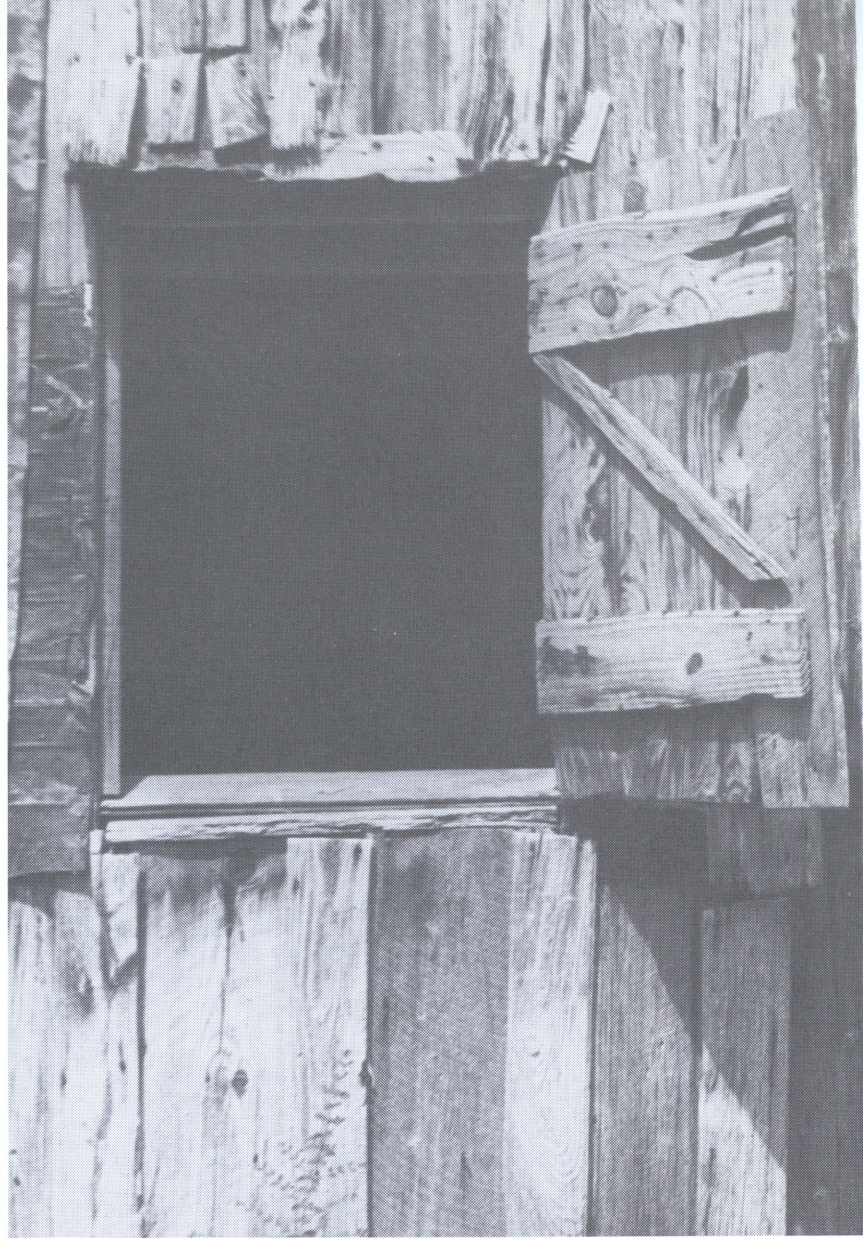
stay ahead of the potatoes

his starch-skin had
begun to erode in flash flood gullies
around his eyes,
where the morning's slant light
fought for the day
and, always winning, left
shadows there
in the cut basin.

stay ahead of the potatoes
he said
and i didn't know better.
i was grown
to hear his graveled
hello there, buckwheat!
greet me,
never knowing how they could
catch me.

new crops come
but in the old there is a sureness,
like this short-stout
man who fights what he doesn't understand,
but does,
resisting famine and failure,
staying a step
ahead of the grave and
to me,
once more beyond my understanding.

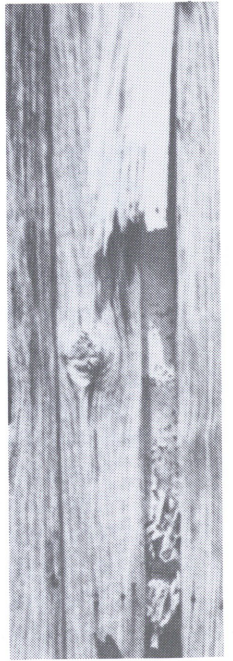
Todd Keith



Consumption Bus

Broiling heat like steam rushes over the people,
The juveniles, muffling their noises in the mid-morning
Mobile oven taking us to Draper—
Somewhere northeast of Wetumpka.
Twenty-three undiligent punks, the judge,
A redneck father, a street-wise bus driver, or so he thinks,
He playing horrid gospel music,
And I wondering, How can God appreciate that?
No relief in the opened rectangle windows,
Only the constant heat and the constant slap of summer.
So the yellow furnace travels on, mis-shifting, through
The backyard Alabama wilting landscape,
Green and slightly brown in all its discomfort.
Slowly, rhythmically, the shallow noise
Of paper and plastic wrappers, brown paper bags, pop-tops,
Air escaping the once pressurized non-returnable bottles.
And soon the grasshopper-like munching of apples, red and
golden,
Of sandwiches, starched white bread with cheese, mustard,
and bologna,
Or whole grain wheat, cheese, mayo, and ham or some poultry.
Me: nothing. The judge: crackers and a diet lemon-lime soda.
The juveniles: like a plague of infesting insects, swarming,
smothering
Chomping and biting, grinding and chewing—
The constant bickering of teeth, gums, tongue, and throat.
And I am reading Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*,
And I feel like I am.

Simmons B. Buntin



Anne Elizabeth Smith

Cattle Village

By David Brooks

Pass, please.”
“Come on, boys, you should know me by now.”
“Just procedure, Dr. Oflife. Could I see your pass, please?”

“And by the way, name’s Tobias.”

“Right. Now where did I put that pass? Somewhere in . . . Oh, yes. Here it is.”

Slipping his hand into the inside pocket of his cape, Ebb found his pass and handed it over to the guard.

“Not a very flattering picture, boys.”

“They never are. Goin’ in for a fresh one?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“A blood carrier. You’re goin’ in for the hunt, right?”

“Why, yes, research purposes.”

“Isn’t this the fifth time this month?”

“Why, yes, it is. Can’t stand the freeze-dried stuff you know.”

“Good night for it in there,” Tobias said pointing toward the village which lay hidden behind the mountain barrier.

“Yes, quite dark. Thank you.”

“No problem, Doc.”

Ebb watched Tobias walk toward the gate house complaining to the other guard about fruitcake and old farts.

What’s wrong with the hunt? Ebb wondered. It’s the way things used to be. Young smart asses don’t know what it was like before the revolution.

Lost in thought, Ebb moved toward the village, toward the ring of mountains ahead. Deimos and Phobos swam across the reflected night sky caught within a gravitational pit. Ebb could hear the familiar sound of grinding stone ahead as part of the mountain base detached itself and shifted sideways revealing a tunnel. Once inside, Ebb patted the biomotion recorder at his side and hopped in a carrier. After strapping himself in comfortably, he shot off down the tunnel toward the village.

Right. Then left. Then right. Or is it left? Clot! Ebb thought to himself, hoping he wasn’t going to get lost in the tunnels. Right. Right. Now down. Good, here we are.

Stepping out of the carrier, Ebb walked toward a sign marked entrance. Grabbing a high-necked cloak from the wall, he slipped his passcard into a slot near the sign. Down here beneath the surface Ebb felt safe, secure. He didn’t want to leave the natural tomb, but he’d come here for a purpose.

The village was Ebb’s own brain child. It was the reason he was at the Mars colony. The colony was the only place where man was man. The villagers know only what the vampires had taught them. They were an isolated patch of humans. The only free patch of humans anywhere. They were to be studied, to be preyed upon. All the others had become vampires or were animals used as blood producers.

Research. Yes. Need more data, Ebb thought to himself.

With a click, the rock wall slid to the side of the tunnel. Grabbing his pass on the way out, Ebb felt desire start to build within himself. Pushing aside the brush covering, he darted down the mountain side. Ebb’s grey pale face and red-yellow eyes seemed to float down the slope. The rest of his body was hidden beneath the long black cloak. Ebb approached the tree line and began to slow down. As he moved further toward the outskirts of the village, lights began to flicker across the valley. Caught within a massive forest, the village looked as though its life was being drained away. Moving closer still, Ebb could see the villagers drifting from place to place under the protection of lanterns. Echoes of merriment arose from the local tavern to greet Ebb as he slowed, nearing the village. To the north a large black lake sat calmly awaiting victims. Ebb grinned to himself as a burning sensation began to spread throughout his body.

Reminds me of the old days, he thought to himself.

He was passing through town now, houses moved back behind him to the right and left. A cold vacuum-like breeze kicked up dead leaves cluttering the street. Off to the right a door burst open, yawning back and forth. Light from inside flickered on and off in the street, dancing around the drunk that lay at Ebb’s feet.

Manna from heaven, Ebb thought.

He grabbed the man’s feet and began to tug. Nothing happened. He leaned lower; the body lurched forward unwillingly. Looking up at the sign hanging over the yawning door, Ebb flinched as he read, “The Silver Dagger.” A trough in the sand was the only sign left as Ebb dragged the body around the corner of the pub. From within the tavern the clinking of mugs marked the beginning of Barret’s Privateers. The patrons sang strongly against the night, against the cold, against life. Ebb stopped dragging the body to listen for a few moments to the sorrowful tale being spun by the living.

Looking down at the semi-conscious human, Ebb could see the man’s life reflected in his face. Well worn tracks

of laughter shimmered around his mouth, while signs of worry and fear traced their way across his forehead and about his eyes. Ebb's gaze fell to the pulsing rhythmic beat of the man's neck. Dropping down to his knees, Ebb lifted the man's head onto his thighs. By grabbing a tuft of hair, Ebb shifted the head until a starch white patch of neck showed. Slowly Ebb drifted towards the patch until a warm liquid-like sensation filled his mouth and spilled to the sandy ground below.

The sounds of the tavern grew faint as Ebb felt a tingling sensation travel throughout his limbs. The head lolled to the side and dropped off Ebb's lap thudding dully against the ground, motionless. Ebb felt the tingling subside and a numbness take its place. As he stood up the ground swayed below him, tilting left and right. Light from the tavern window above blurred into a stream of brightness, while figures in cut glass battled amongst the stars.

What the hell has he been drinking? Ebb wondered.

Stumbling toward the back of the tavern, Ebb ricocheted off a wall and into a pile of garbage. Looking out toward the street, he saw a lantern dodge by. Beneath its glow there walked a figure of beauty framed by a high-necked gown that opened like a diamond in the back. The woman glanced toward the alley where Ebb lay immersed in refuse, not wanting to see what could be there. She looked away sharply, quickening her pace out of respect for the dark. Ebb attempted to stand but was forced to lean against the wall, clutching his head, as the lantern winked out behind the next building.

You old fool. You should know better, Ebb told himself.

Hugging the wall, Ebb moved in the direction of the vanished lantern. Gurgling sounds drifted up from Ebb's stomach. A violent surge of liquid splattered against the wall, sending Ebb back towards the opposing building. Wiping his lips clean, Ebb staggered after the woman. Rounding the corner, he was just in time to see the lantern crash to the ground. A dark figure stood over the now lifeless body. A hush of silence raced across the village, dampening the sounds of the tavern. The body below the figure moved, screams of terror contorted its once-beautiful face. Lashing out at her, the black figure pounced. A patch of white shone in the darkness as the figure lifted the body into his arms. Black streaks trickled down through the diamond-shaped opening. Ebb froze.

Better get out of here. That kid just cut his stake.

Two humans burst through the tavern door and out into the street.

"Quick, over there! Vampire!" Ebb said pointing toward the figure.

Not waiting to see if the two humans had taken the bait, Ebb was off and running in the other direction. Entering the forest, he felt icy coldness surround him. A gruesome cheer rose out of the dark as Ebb started to climb up toward the tunnel.

Sorry, bud. It's every vamp for himself, Ebb thought as he approached the tunnel entrance.

Groping around in the dark, Ebb searched his pockets for the tunnel passcard.



Mike Goodson

"Holy water! Where are you?" he said aloud, finding his pockets empty.

Looking up toward the reflected sky in disgust, Ebb noticed a glow beginning to form on the fringes of the horizon. Ebb sunk to the ground defeated, his heart pumping coldly out of sync. All around him the dark images of the night gave way to the crisp light of day. A pinpoint flickering of pain shot through Ebb's arm. Shifting to the side, Ebb rolled over, out of the way of the reflected ray. There sat the passcard shimmering in the dirt. Grudgingly he thrust a hand out to grasp the card anticipating the pain that would soon come. Beads of perspiration collected on Ebb's brow as he watched the sky lighten.

"Getting a little too close for comfort, Dr. Oflice," Ebb said to himself.

Squinting in the rising light, Ebb frantically searched the slope for the tunnel, while cleaning the passcard.

"Here we go," he said as he slipped in behind the brush covering the tunnel entrance.

Collapsing to the floor Ebb ripped his cloak off and hurled it against the wall. The darkness of the tunnel slithered around him, covering him like a snake. Wrapped in night, Ebb pushed himself toward the tunnel wall looking for a way to steady his quivering body. Once he felt confident he could walk again, Ebb slipped into the carrier and shot off through the tunnel. Looking down at his side he patted the biomotion recorder, wondering what the data would yield. A look of disgust crossed his face. He had forgotten to turn it on. Exiting the tunnel Ebb walked briskly past the guard post unaware of the guards, unaware of the tunnel behind him, unaware of the shadow following him.

"Dr. Oflice! Stop!"

Ebb turned toward the sound behind him.

"Dr. Oflice, we need to see your passcard. Please."

"Wh-what?" Ebb asked as he handed the guard his pass.

"That's Tobias, Dr. Oflice."

"Nice to meet you, Tobias, name's Oflice; Ebb Oflice."

"Right. Have a hard hunt, Dr. Oflice?"

"Hunt?"

"Right. Yu-You just take it easy, Dr. Oflice. Good night."

"Good night, boys."

Ebb's apartment wasn't far away. Looking up into the perpetual night, he wondered what the hell he was doing here and how things were going back on Earth. Ever since the establishment of the United Undead States, Ebb had felt as though good old-fashioned vampiric morals were being ignored. He couldn't remember the last time he'd shared a warm one with a friend. Everything nowadays was so high tech, so mechanical. For blood's sake, there was even a pro-lifer movement. The younger generation just couldn't remember the years of caution before the revolution. What with synthetic blood and all, most vamps didn't even hunt anymore, even for sport.

Ebb stopped off at his mailbox and found a letter protruding from it.

Fan mail, he thought.

Looking down at the envelope, Ebb saw the letters DIRA

scribbled in blood. He was probably the only one in the colony that could remember the old IRA and their bombing campaigns.

What a waste, he thought to himself. They couldn't achieve unification when they were alive. What do they expect now?

Probably the same old threat, holy water, uv rays, silver bullets, Ebb thought as he crumpled up the envelope, throwing it aside along with the local colony advertisements. The DIRA had been trying to scare him for years.

What I need is a nice warm coffin, Ebb thought to himself.

Something was wrong though; he could feel it. The hunt hadn't done anything for him. He felt strange, out of place. The hunt had been his way, the way. He was different, eccentric they said. His boss didn't care just as long as he kept publishing, but lately he had been forgetting things and hunting more. Climbing down the steps into his apartment, Ebb was lost in thought pondering the *Mars Constitution* headlines if word leaked out about his habits, "Prominent Doctor of Philosophy Loses Touch; Succumbs to the Hunt." Flipping through the rest of his mail, Ebb was unaware of the shadow moving closer behind him. Before stepping inside Ebb took one last look up into the sky. A martian landscape filled it, blocking



Steve Winslett

out everything else. Violent storms the size of the colony twisted across the sky racing along the surface of the distant planet. Reflected sunlight filtered by the exterior screens of the biosphere bathed the colony in dark red light, the only form of sunlight allowed. Ebb slipped inside his apartment, leaving the red day behind, lighting a candle as he moved over to his coffin. Something about the flickering light brought back the image of the woman in the village. Guilt streaked across Ebb's mind.

Why do I feel this? Must be all that lifer propaganda.

Ebb's mind faded away, lost in thought again. Sitting on the edge of his coffin, Ebb watched his past drift by. Hunt after hunt flashed in front of him. The terror in their eyes. The beat, beat, beating below the surface. Ebb realized for the first time that the guards had shown that same fear tonight at his return. He couldn't remember the last time he'd gotten cold with someone.

"Has my time passed?" he asked out loud.

The candle fizzled in its own wax and still Ebb sat there thinking, unaware of the shadow that froze at his words. Ebb's thoughts drifted over his career and came up empty.

"I can't remember what it's like to feel emotions. Sickly pleasure has taken the place of happiness. It was only 250 years ago. Why me? Why my mind?"

"Your time has passed!" the shadow hissed as she sprayed Ebb with Holy Water.

Writhing in pain, Ebb swung out at the darkness, at the voice. He fumbled for the lights, jolting his coffin lid. Azreal lit a match, her yellow scarred face blinked into reality. She held a wooden stake in her hand. Lunging at Ebb, she caught him in the arm. Ebb felt a cold liquid pour down his shoulder, while the stake surged deeper, severing muscles and crushing bone. Pop—Azreal's jaw snapped as Ebb backhanded her across the room. Regaining her feet, Azreal crouched low in the corner steadying a silver rod. Ebb reached over to the wooden stake protruding from his shoulder and yanked. His arm hung limp, numb. Brandishing the silver rod, Azreal targeted Ebb's heart and missed, driving the rod through his thigh instead. Tossing the wooden stake aside, Ebb bit down hard on Azreal's neck. A cold stream erupted in his mouth and slipped over her chest.

"Fool," Azreal laughed.

"But why?"

Azreal wrenched the rod free from Ebb's thigh and thrust it upward through his right shoulder. Ebb fell across Azreal, forcing her down to the ground. The blunt end of the rod punctured her left arm and planted itself in the ground. Tearing away from her neck, Ebb found a mask caught upon his fangs. Azreal's scarred yellow face hung limp in Ebb's mouth. Both struggled to free themselves from each other, from the ground. Rearing back, Ebb head-

butted Azreal's face, knocking her unconscious. Planting his one good arm, he heaved upward, releasing himself from the rod as he fell backwards to the floor. Slowly he crawled toward his coffin, opened the lid, and rolled over into it, slamming it shut.

Some time later, Ebb cautiously lifted the lid and peered through the crack. Azreal still lay unconscious on the floor. Ebb could see her wounds beginning to heal. His own were completed, only the Holy Water scars across his stomach remained as a reminder of the battle. Stepping cautiously toward Azreal, Ebb picked up the wooden stake. Moving over toward her motionless body, he lifted the stake above his head directly over her heart. Plunging downward with all his might, Ebb stopped inches away from her chest. He froze.

Vampire killing vampire: the thought echoed in his mind.

Now we are just like them.

The stake fell to the floor alongside two empty vials.

Azreal's eyes opened. She looked up at Ebb and then down toward the stake.

Why? her eyes asked.

Tears trickled down Ebb's

face. He hadn't realized how much he missed life.

The experiment. The village. Have I hunted out of jealousy?

Have I learned what I set out to find? he wondered.

Azreal backed into a corner of the room, away from Ebb. She hadn't expected this. She hadn't been trained for this. As a member of the DIRA she hadn't expected to feel for her victim, to fear the death of another vampire. After all the DIRA supported the pro-lifers, by violent means, of course. The contradiction sat before her challengingly. Ebb's eyes widened.

"That's it. Our common enemy is death. But, by nature we face death in life," Ebb thought aloud, unaware of Azreal, unaware of reality.

Azreal sat stunned. She hadn't expected to hear her pro-lifer doctrine repeated by its most vehement enemy.

Shaking away the thoughts cluttering his head, Ebb reached for the wooden stake again.

"Who are you and who do you work for?"

Azreal just sat there stunned, lifeless.

"I said who are you and who do you —"

"Azreal, the DIRA."

"Well, what now? Seems I don't want to kill you and you have obviously failed at killing me. Bet you didn't have this in mind. Did you?"

"No."

"What now? Guess I'm on your side."

Ebb could tell Azreal was facing a possible overload situation. He dropped the stake and moved slowly toward her. Her grey skin had a certain appeal to it when combined with yellow blue eyes.

"A screeching sound shimmered through the coffin as the first nail was drawn out and then one by one the other nails disappeared."

She must have gotten vampirized at a young age, Ebb thought.

Sitting down beside her, Ebb offered the use of his coffin for healing purposes if she wished. She agreed and both of them retired to the coffin.

Outside the apartment the daylight cycle was being run, as the colony slowly spun, orbiting Mars. The artificial lights stepped up their brightness as vampires went off to work. Two shadows lingered around Ebb's apartment. Now it was their turn. They had seen the cause betrayed. Moving quickly into Ebb's apartment, the two shadows nailed the coffin's lid shut.

"What the hell is happening?" Ebb said as he rolled over on his side to look at Azreal.

"My backups are here," Azreal said.

"What are they going to do with us?"

"We die."

"Why? It serves no purpose."

"Because it has been planned that way. When I agreed to come after you my fate was sealed."

"It has been planned! What's been planned? By who? What for?"

"By tradition, for the cause. We are to be taken to the village."

"What?"

"That was where they were going to take me after I killed you."

"Why?"

"For killing a vampire."

"What the hell?"

"We support the doctrine of pro-life, remember?"

"You're more screwed up than I thought. I've got to

get the clot out of here!"

"Too late," Azreal said.

Clawing at the inside of the coffin, Ebb fought to get out. After a while the coffin stopped moving. Ebb could hear people milling around outside. A screeching sound shimmered through the coffin as the first nail was drawn out, and then one by one the other nails disappeared. As the last nail was being pulled, Ebb kicked upward, sending the lid flying. Immediately, hands reached out to grab and pull at him. Ebb clawed for the nearest flesh, tearing, cutting at anything. He bared his fangs, clamping down on whatever was within range. Warm liquid flowed over his entire body mingling with his own icy fluid. Ebb felt himself being torn apart by the mob. Looking back at the coffin, he saw Azreal. She was lying motionless, hands outstretched in peace. Three wooden stakes protruded from her chest, while holy water ate away at her face. Ebb went limp. He could feel himself being carried somewhere for something. Just as he had once lost his life, he now lost his living death. Pain shot through his right hand, then his left. He felt a spike being driven through his feet. He felt himself being lifted higher and higher. Looking out toward the horizon he saw the dawn. The reflected sun reluctantly peeked over the mountains, spilling into the valley. Ebb could feel a burning sensation begin to spread across his body.

"Pass, please," The words stabbed out at Ebb.

Looking down at the crowd, Ebb saw Tobias laughing back at him. Gazing defiantly at the sun, Ebb felt his eyes swell and burst. A warm liquid spilled across his chest; the blood of his victims, his blood.



Tea

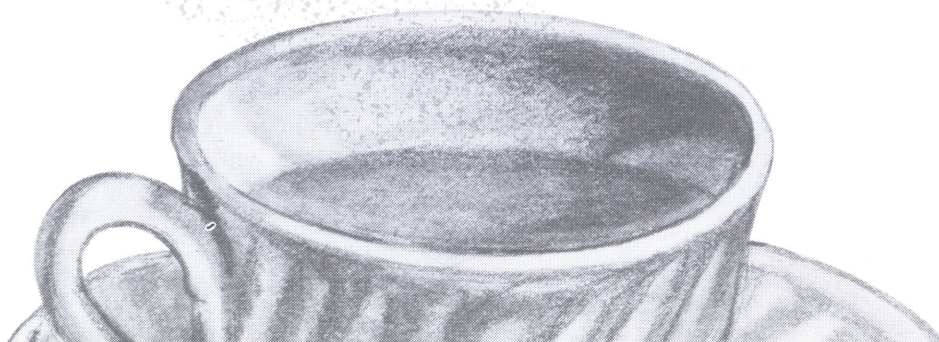
Comfort-steam

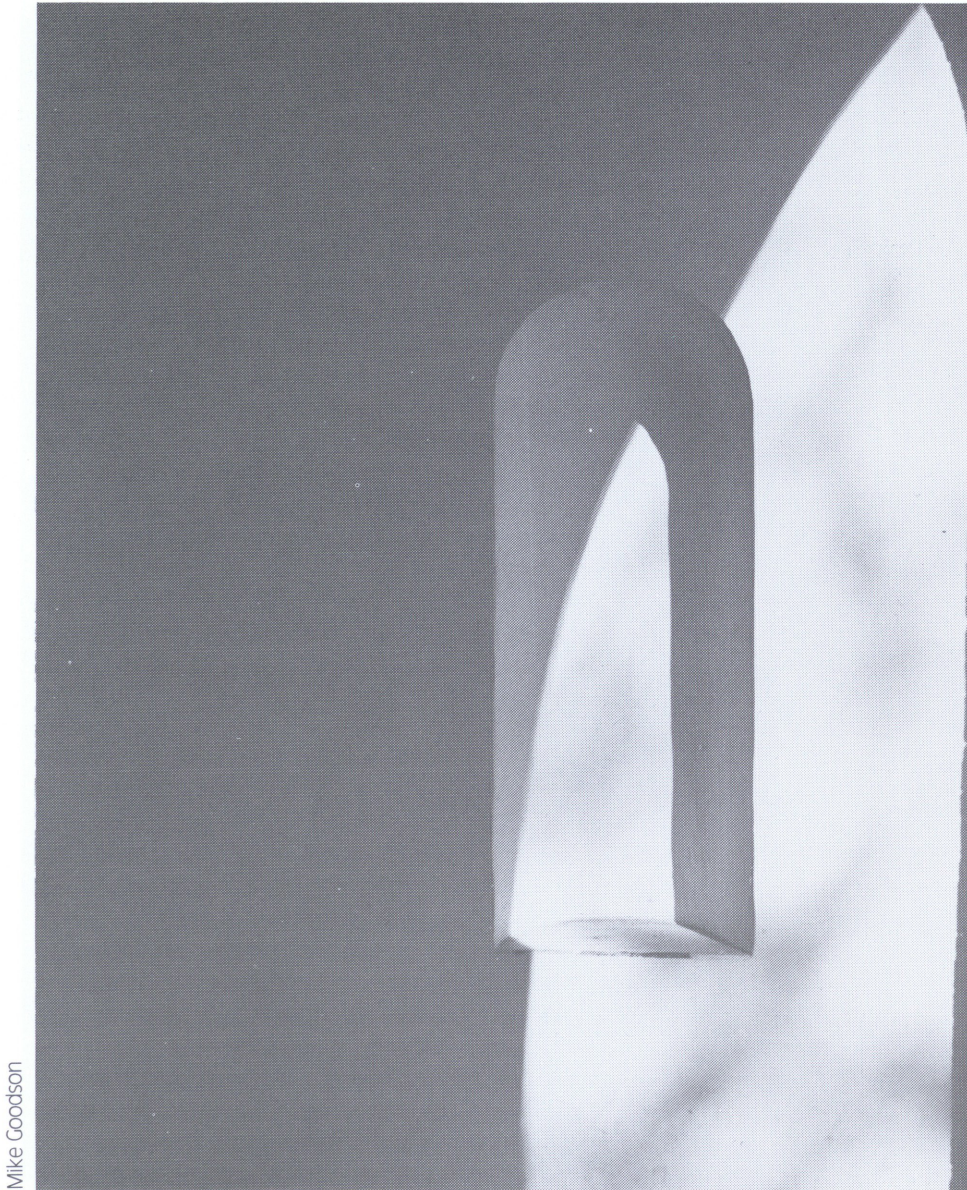
rises from the round

life-giving orb.

A momentary illusion
suddenly, shattered
by scorched lips.

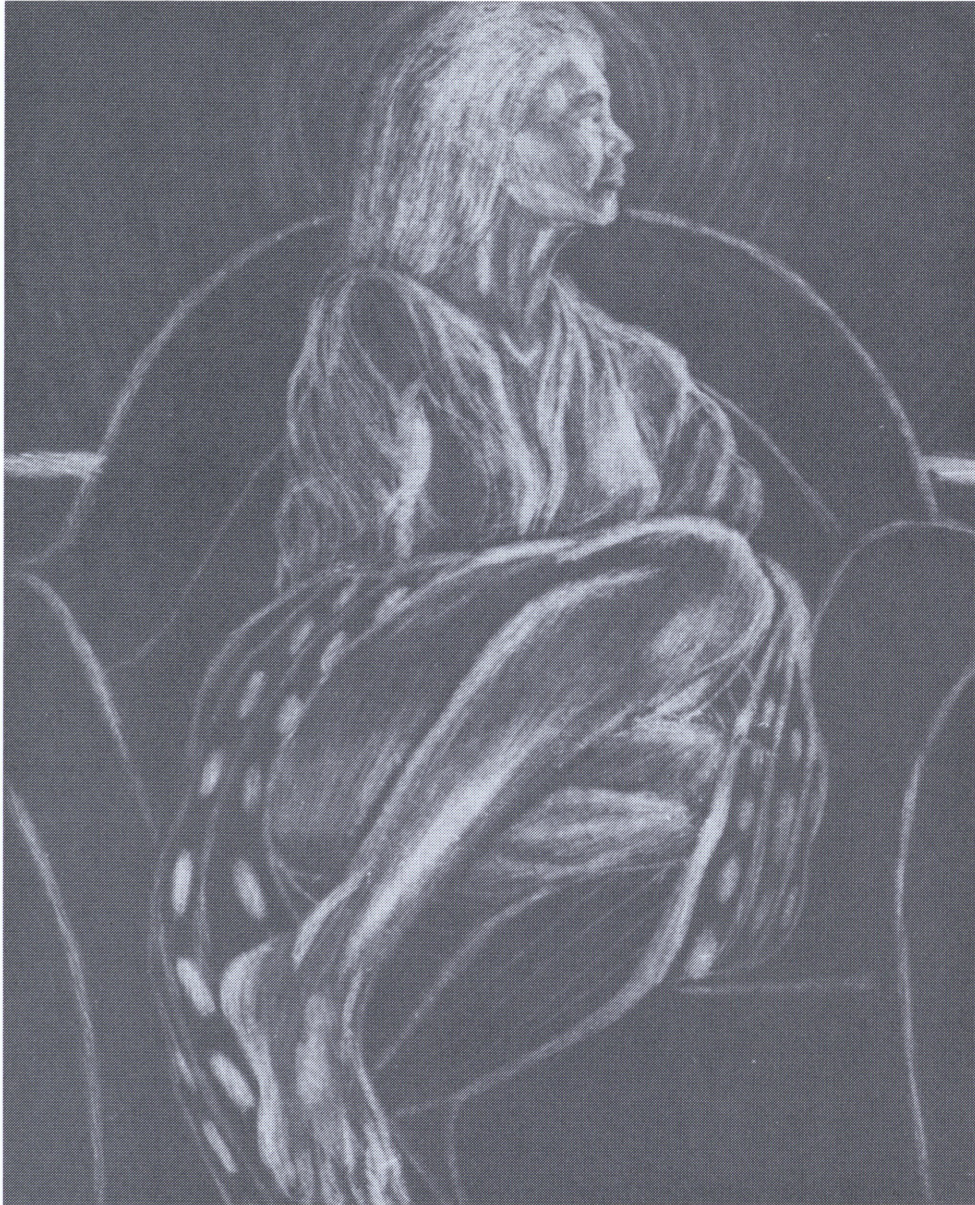
Robin Dare



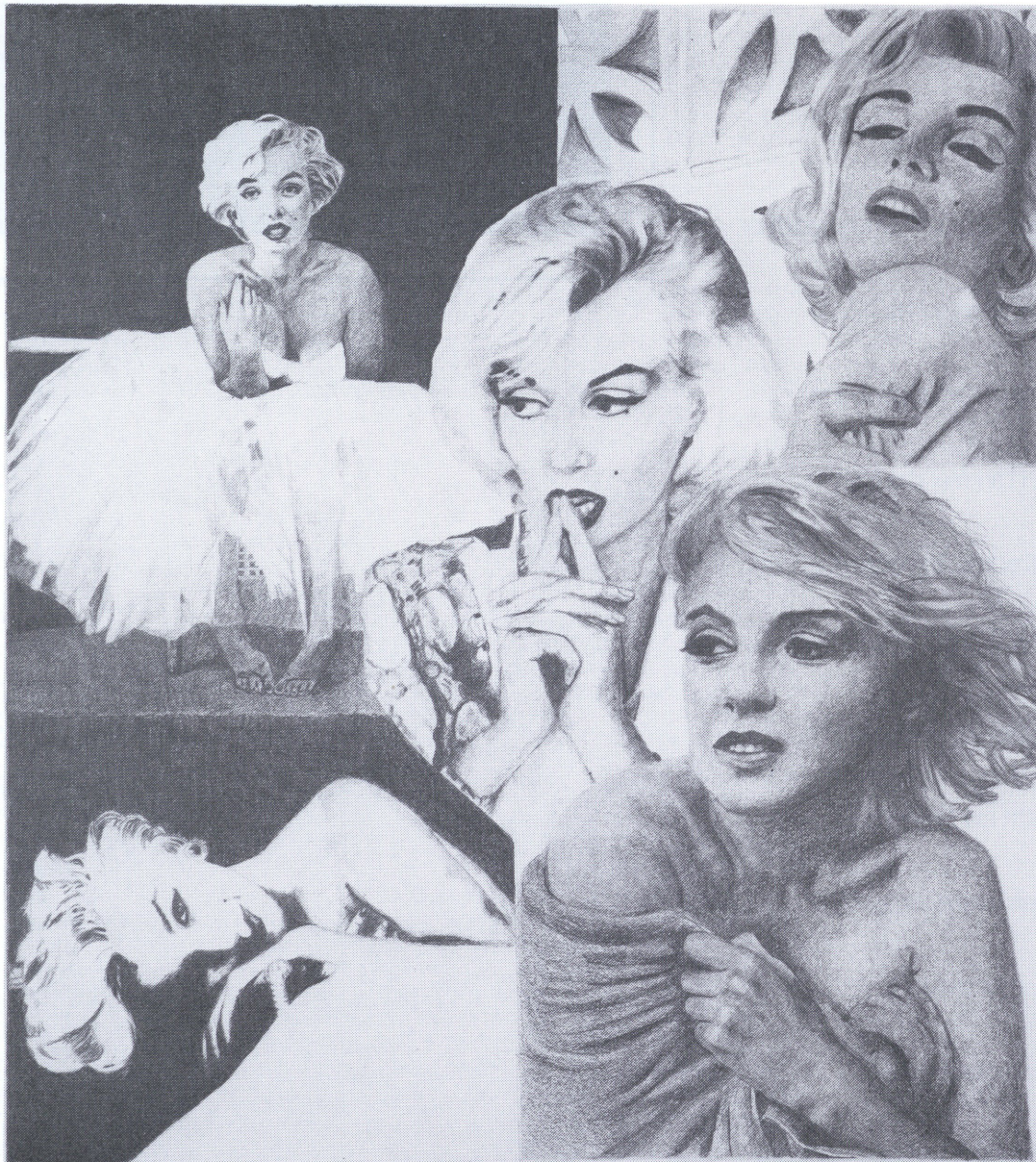


Mike Goodson

Stephanie Frey



Jenny Jurjevich



The First Night

Dark room—
Her perfume
lingers in the hot sticky air.
Free soul
heart of fire
mind like a rainbow razor-blade.
I feel
her green eyes
tear into my own soul's windows
looking
for a clue,
hoping to unearth the source from
which I
draw my Fear.
Not the fear that paralyzes
but the
adrenal
rush that comes from cheating death or
having
orgasm.
Should I let her in on it? No . . .
maybe
tomorrow.
But now she grows impatient and
ever
closer she
comes—until I can feel the heat
of her
body and
number the freckles on her nose
(there are
not many)—
so close I can feel the wetness
that she
exhales in
nervous breaths. She is enchanting
silent
beautiful.
I brush her with my fingertips.
Elec-
tricity
whips between us like some manic
twisted
Will-o'-wisp.
Bodies touch ever so lightly—
we kiss
and then we
push closer and closer until
a bolt
of purest
light comes crashing through our body.
Blood pounds
in our head
and we are blinded by our own
burst of
Life (yes, life).
"That," I tell her, "has to be my
fav'rite
emotion."
And she throws back her head and laughs.

Charles R. Gaston, Jr.

Karin Fecteau



Dust

My life has been a constant, longing search,
An essay on a probing introspection,
A quest for truth. Though ever on the verge,
I've found none yet in my alert inspection;
But rather have been, since my time of birth,
Less sure each day of morality and trust
And what my thoughts and yours will all be worth
When we are dust.

Mary Jo Sumner

The Essence of Inhumanity

Auburn's Abandoned Animals

By Diana Webb

Considering buying a pet? Perhaps you might be interested in a few stories about other Auburn pets. I don't know what her owner had named her, but we called her Nermal for the few hours she lurked around our house on the day after summer graduation. She had glossy, silky fur—obviously a pampered, indoor cat—and was terrified. We tried to coax her to follow us, but she shrank beneath a bush, shivering with fright. In shock, she was bewildered, confused, and ignorant of how to provide for her basic needs. The next morning, her flattened body lay on the road. As cars drove by, the ruff of her tail blew in the breeze. She died an abandoned Auburn pet.

Pesker's story, on the other hand, is not as sad. Bought as a kitten by students living in a trailer, Pesker was ignored. He traveled from trailer to trailer, looking for handouts and a warm caress. When his owners graduated, they left Pesker in Auburn. One month later, students found Pesker inside a trailer, starved—his skin stretched tautly over his skeleton—and dehydrated. Today he has a home where food and attention are provided. He is one of the lucky ones.

So is Oscar, a yellow tabby that a professor found severely starved and beaten. The professor provided Oscar with veterinary care and a home where two children adore him.

"Whoever owned him obviously

did not really care about him. He had scars and bloody welts from where he had been hit with who knows what," the professor recalls. "I found him by the roadside the day after graduation. He had been abandoned."

Many Auburn pets—mostly dogs and cats but also birds, reptiles and rodents—are abandoned when quarter breaks or graduation arrives. The students—who once offered their pets warm beds to sleep on and full bowls of food and water—either leave the animals temporarily during the quarter break, assuming their pets will scavenge for themselves, or permanently, throwing away the animals as if they were outgrown clothing.



One student from Auburn remarks, "It seems like there are hundreds of stray animals during quarter breaks. It's heartbreaking. They have no food or water, and they wander around with sad eyes, looking for their human. They don't understand what has happened . . . that they have been betrayed."

The corpses of Auburn's abandoned pet population rest by streets and highways, monuments to their confusion and bewilderment at being deserted by their owners. They roam the city, searching for garbage cans and hoping to find a scrap of food, a warm touch, and a kind voice. But most find only death.

California veterinarian Richard T. Marshall asserts that "owning a pet is a privilege, not a right." Students, however, usually become pet-owners without considering long-term commitment to animals. Students buy pets for a variety of reasons: for companionship, for protection, as a status symbol, to meet people, or for sport. Most students view the animal as being their friend during the often lonely days of college and do not include their pet in post-college plans.

Pet ownership must be contemplated seriously. It can be compared to child-raising. If you decide to have a pet in your life, expect to care for it from youth to old age, a life cycle that can range from ten to twenty years.

In order to be a responsible pet-owner, students must consider several factors. First, are you willing to care for and be responsible for your pet until it dies? When will you graduate, and then, where will you be working? Will you be able to provide for the animal five years from now? Ten years from now? How will your family (and significant others) react to the pet?

Are you willing to locate a suitable—and responsible—home for the animal if you can no longer provide for its care or if extenuating circumstances (such as having children, being relocated, becoming unemployed) occur? Do you have enough money to care for the animal? Are you

truly able to evaluate your future resources and capabilities? In actuality, most students, busy attending classes and participating in extracurricular activities, do not have sufficient time to devote to a pet. Are you purchasing this animal for selfish reasons or do you honestly believe that you can offer a pet a quality, life-long home?

Veterinary philosopher Bernard E. Rollin comments that "we often forget that . . . pet or companion animals . . . are legitimate objects of moral concern and attention toward whom our actions must be judged in concepts of right and wrong." Students considering pet ownership must

offer it love and attention on a daily basis?

Rollin notes that people rely on animals to provide friendship and love, "yet it is man who systematically violates this contract in the most essential way, callously infringing upon the dog's rights to life and nature." He continues that, "millions [of pets] die of disease, starvation, and automobile accidents after they have been turned loose by owners. And the overwhelming majority of animals killed are not feral animals who have never had a home . . . but animals who have at one point been owned by a person."

Why do students abandon animals?

"The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them."

remember that animals are alive and have physical and emotional needs. You should evaluate the animal's best interest in addition to your desires for a pet.

Next you should appraise where you live. Does your lease restrict animals? Do you have access to areas to exercise the animal? Can you provide it with a good home with ample water, high-quality food, shelter, and veterinary care—including annual physicals, vitamins, immunizations, heartworm tablets, and other costly but necessary items? Are you aware of leash laws in Auburn and surrounding communities which require animals to display a license and be under control at all times (Penalties include fines and possible jail terms for the owner and confinement or euthanasia for the animal)?

Are you willing to keep current with animal issues and regulations in your community and take corrective actions? Can you keep your pet inside when you're not at home? Would you spay or neuter the animal to prevent unwanted pregnancies? Will you limit the number of pets you own to how many you can sufficiently care for? Are you agreeable to training your pets to be obedient and good "citizens"? Can you groom your pet, walk it, and

Many students who leave their pets are graduates, quitting school, transferring, or experiencing a life-change such as marriage. Quarter breaks present problems in traveling with the pet and possible disagreements with parents concerning the animal. Other reasons include dissatisfaction—for example, the animal has matured, is too aggressive, or is a nuisance—or the student has moved to a new location with leases or roommates that prohibit pets.

The pet's personal habits—barking, digging, fighting—may annoy both you and neighbors. The daily care requirements may become overwhelming, tedious, expensive, and bothersome. Emergency veterinary bills may exceed student budgets. Some students consider pets as disposable and easily replaceable (usually with a younger and cuter animal) according to whim and fad. Rollin laments that students simply "kill animals because the semester is over and Mom and Dad would not appreciate a new dog."

If you do own a pet and cannot keep it when you graduate, move, or leave for quarter break, please find it a good home. Abandoned animals usually do not survive long in Auburn. They die quickly from starvation,

dehydration, disease, attacks by wild animals, or are hit by cars and trains. Unsupervised animals effect the community negatively. Stray animals desperately root for food wherever they can find trash, especially near houses, and resort to behavior motivated by instincts such as killing other animals and aggressively approaching humans.

They also damage property and may be picked up by animal control officers and destroyed. Ridgewood Village trailer park has recently implemented a program of humanely trapping abandoned and stray cats (which includes unsupervised pets roaming the park) in order to control the park's feral feline population. Your abandoned pet may be picked up by people who scour empty neighborhoods during quarter breaks, looking for strays and untended animals; these dognappers sell the stolen pets to research laboratories where they will most likely be subjected to inhumane testing.

Don't assume that an abandoned pet can fend for itself or that someone else will welcome the pet into a new home. Many Auburn residents sympathize with strays but are overburdened with animals they have already taken in. Be careful in choosing someone who you think will take care of your pet. I can remember one student giving his beautiful fawn boxer to a friend who agreed to keep the dog. Within three days, the dog's stiffened body lay on a highway. The friend had not confined it to a fenced yard as promised.

If you can't take your pet with you or find someone you trust to take care of it, contact the Lee County Humane Society's Glyde Memorial Shelter. They can offer advice and help locate a loving home.

Because so many factors make pet ownership for transient students questionable, why not consider another option? Nancy Coleman, director of the Lee County Humane Society, recommends the shelter's

Sav-a-Pet program where individuals can donate \$25 for the care of an animal, and volunteers are welcome to feed and exercise animals.

Why not visit one of these lonely animals, give it attention and exercise, and enjoy the companionship? Your voluntary care will brighten its day and improve its emotional and physical well-being (increasing its chances of finding a permanent home), and you can help one of Auburn's abandoned without contributing to the problem.

I think George Bernard Shaw summed it up well in *The Devil's Disciple*: "The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity." If you enjoy interactions with pets, donate some of your time to animals already in need of love and attention while you are at Auburn and wait until you can better control your circumstances for the tremendous commitments of pet ownership.



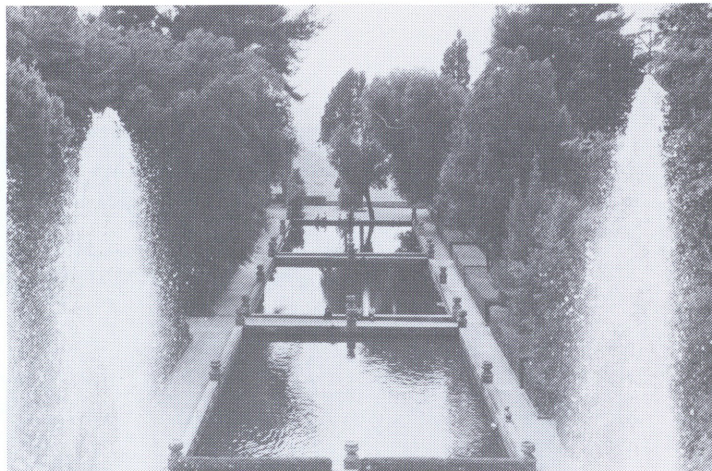
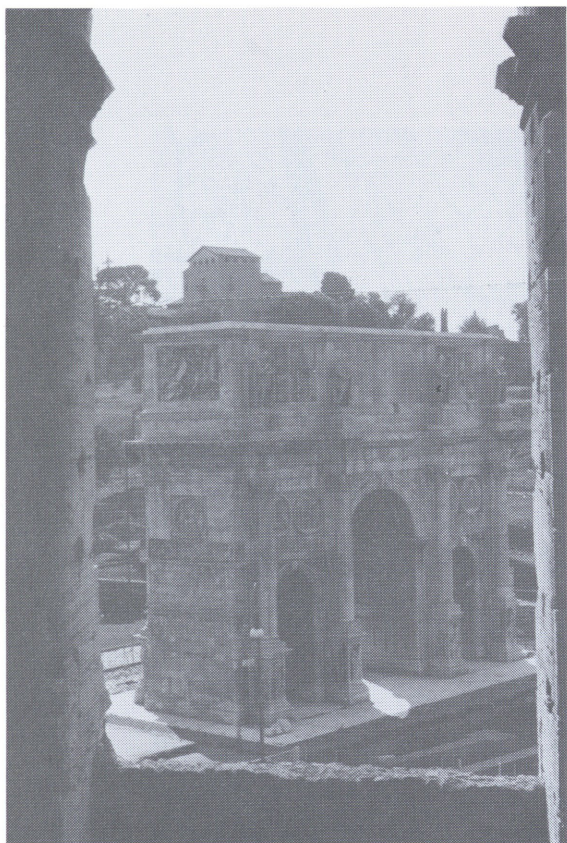
Nancy Murphree



Michael Sheldrick







EUROPE

A Photo Series
by Janet Gonzales

Clockwise from left: Villa d'Este, gardens outside Rome;
The Arch of Constantine;
Villa d'Este; A cityscape of
Florence; The Colosseum in Rome.

John Sease



Spotted Owls and Large Trees

Said she was going to Oregon,
 Something about spotted owls and large trees.
So I followed her
 Past the Great Divide,
 Past the land of low brush and big sky.
The mountains were faces
Painted in green and gray,
 The western slopes always in a scowl.
I waded the great waters of the river called Snake,
Ate from it the trout which carries
 The colors of life.
When finally I came to this land of hers,
I could no longer hide my secret
 Love.
When once I saw her I knew her well,
But she turned away and fled
 From me.
Twelve more days I followed her,
Then found myself on the cliffs
 Overlooking the sea.
The raging Pacific cried to me that night,
More stories of forlorn
 Than my chest could bear.
My journey
 It seemed
Had been for naught,
Even the moon reflected the pain.
The next morning the sun crawled over the eastern ranges,
And a shadow saved me
 From shielding my eyes.
She was there, reborn in the knowledge of something
Which took hold of my outstretched hand, like her.
And we flew above the cliffs
 And the ocean below,
Above the valleys and the ranges which guard them,
Straight into the morning sun.
I asked her if she could bring me peace,
She only smiled, saying
 Something about spotted owls and large trees.

Simmons B. Buntin



Evolution of the Species

The wrinkled forehead of an angry time
Buried his dry locks into dust
Into ash,
The soul that remained
To be ruled by the void.

Sad child eyes caked with disillusion
Wept for the bloody hands that clutched his soul
As he dropped in surrender, calm and abrupt,
Forever to release the one he was.

The eyes lost in the search for innocence
The body maimed fighting shadows
And sanity sold in the name of trust.

All that remained of life was death
And the wind blew a bitter peace of desperation
Through the hollow frame as the glaring midnight
Rose proudly above the shifting dirt.

Until the unwilling scream of rebirth erupted
Into the night.
And from the retching clouds
A white-hot shaft of molten knowledge
Pierced the skin
Bubbled through the veins
And flooding the icy cavern
Froze.

As wind gasped in the energy of life
The thick atmosphere gathered close to see
The hard cracked soul brutally forged
In the tumultuous genesis.

Newly ripped from the grave of innocence
A bitter man rubbed the eyes that still were blind,
Dragged behind his crippled legs, then cursed
The fate of human life and
Damned it for a million deaths.

Rhonda Cunningham



EASY MONEY

By Steve Holley

Beneath the offshore oil rig, rolling swells rocked the small work-boat as raindrops hammered the glass porthole to the control room. Inside, a buzzing fan attempted to circulate the stale air. Bracing himself against the motion of the sea, the technician held tightly to the control console. Reaching out, he moved a small control-stick to the right.

Far below the rocking boat, inside the oil rig's underwater structure, a small remotely operated vehicle clicked and whirled, then slowly turned right. Primarily an observation and inspection tool, the remotely operated vehicle, or R.O.V., was electrically controlled from the surface by long insulated wiring. Small thruster motors enabled the R.O.V. to maneuver on command and a closed-circuit television camera displayed its image on the control console in front of the operator.

The control room door opened and the other technician stepped inside; rain and fresh air blew in with him. Without looking up the operator asked, "Feeling better?"

"A little."

"It might help if you tried to eat something," the operator said.

"I don't think I could keep it down. Where are you?"

Pointing to a large, round structural member on the console screen, he said, "I think I'm on the horizontal cross-bracing. Now what?"

"Just follow it. It should lead you to the other side of the rig. Come left a little." The operator gently adjusted the control-stick to bring the structural brace back into the center of the screen.

"Do you have to stand right over my shoulder?" asked the operator.

"You're dripping."

"Sorry. Come left some more."

"I am coming left. There must be some current down there."

Something brown bumped the camera and passed by the screen.

"What was that?" asked the operator.

"Probably a fish. They're attracted to the lights."

"That was no fish," he said as he adjusted the control-stick.

"Come left some more."

"I am coming left!" the operator exclaimed. He twisted in his seat to face the other technician. "Do you want to do this?" he asked.

"No . . . that's okay . . . I still don't feel too good."

"Well, then let me do it, okay?"

"You're drifting away from the bracing!"

Turning around, the operator saw that the cross-bracing was almost off the screen. He pushed the control-stick to the left, but there was no response.

"You're gonna lose it if you don't come left."

"It's all the way over," said the operator, "and nothing's happening."

"Back it up." The cross-bracing disappeared from the screen.

"Not left! Back up!"

"I am backing up!" Suddenly the R.O.V. lurched to a halt. On the screen was a close-up of a rusted wire rope.

"Oh, shit!" The operator flipped two switches and pulled back hard on the control-stick. The image on the screen tilted wildly and then went blank.

The operator leaned forward on the

control console and pressed his damp forehead against his fist.

"Now what?" he asked.

Reaching over his shoulder, the other technician cut off the power to the R.O.V.

"We'll have to call the office and get them to send out some divers to recover it," he said quietly.

"Great."

* * *

The sunlight filtered down through the emerald green water and landed in bright flecks on Merle's back, while above him a shimmering school of yellowtail darted past the oil rig. The diver paid them no attention. He slowly rubbed a pneumatic grinder back and forth across a structural weld until it shone bright silver. With his legs wrapped around the oil rig's structure for leverage, the diver worked methodically, grinding back and forth. A gurgling, boiling stream of bubbles shot skyward from the tool in his hands.

Thirty-five feet above him, a steel-hulled work-boat was moored to the oil rig. On deck, Richard, another diver, sat under a canvas awning and manned the radio set. It was his responsibility to maintain communication with the diver in the water to ensure his safety. Richard pressed a lever on the radio.

"Okay, Merle?"

"Fine as frog hair, topside. I'm about done grinding this weld and as soon as I get it all buffed up and shiny, you can come down and take your pictures, over."

"Roger, Merle."

"I'll tell you what though . . . I'm taking my time. Yes sir, I want this job to last. This shallow water stuff may only pay a day rate, but I'll give up any amount of depth-pay to get these little shallow jobs where the water's clear and the work is light. Let me tell you, this is easy money."

"Roger." Richard pulled his sunglasses down from the top of his head and pushed them into place. He was not accustomed to working with a non-stop talker and he found it annoying. The bubbling sounds of the pneumatic grinder in the background could not even drown out Merle's words on the radio.

" . . . so according to this guy who wrote the book you can get a \$100,000 a year on just twenty-five acres. Now that's my idea of easy money! Just sit back and drink beer and watch them apple trees grow. That's so easy even you could do it 'Hollywood!'" Merle's laughter gurgled out of the radio speaker.

"Topside, I'm moving from this weld to the one below it on the vertical diagonal from leg B2 to leg A2, over."

Merle kicked his fins and pushed himself upward. He stretched his cramped legs, then dropped down below the structural member he had just finished grinding.

Richard looked at the plan of the oil rig's underwater structure and noted Merle's location.

"Roger, Merle." Asshole, he thought. Why does he seem to enjoy calling everyone from California by the name "Hollywood"? Richard shook his head and gazed towards the horizon.

The diving supervisor, Tim, walked up behind him.

"Merle getting to you?" Tim smiled.

"Does he always talk so much, even when he's in the water?"

"Talk? You mean you haven't heard him sing?" Tim chuckled.

"You've got to be kidding?"

"Nope. I once heard him sing 'Wabash Cannonball' when he was on helium. It was hilarious," he laughed. Even Richard had to laugh at the thought of Merle singing in the

squeaky, "Donald Duck" voice a diver had when breathing helium and oxygen.

"That's too funny," Richard said, "but he's still an asshole."

Tim's smile disappeared. He looked down at the younger diver for several seconds before he replied.

"You may not like him, but Merle's one of the best I've ever worked with."

Richard looked up, surprised.

"Merle's been out here on the Gulf longer than anybody I can think of. When I was trying not to flunk out of college he was already a working diver. Back in 1967, he was a member of the Westinghouse Gulf Oil team that set a world's record working dive of 600 feet."

"Merle had an uncle who was an ex-Navy diver. He took him on as a tender when Merle was eighteen or nineteen and taught him everything he knew."

"I didn't know that!"

"That's no small accomplishment for someone who never went to dive school."

"No way! I thought that everybody had to graduate from a commercial diving school."

"They do now," Tim said, "but back then, about the only place to learn diving was in the Navy. Merle had an uncle who was an ex-Navy diver. He took him on as a tender when Merle was eighteen or nineteen and taught him everything he knew. Merle told me he made his first paid dive on his twenty-first birthday. That was all hard-hat diving back then. You know, the Navy Mark V rig with the canvas suit, the big copper helmet, and the weighted shoes."

"Damn," Richard said quietly.

"Why don't you ask him sometime? He likes to talk about it."

"Yeah, I'll bet he does," Richard smirked. "If he's so good, then how come he's not a supervisor like you?"

Tim looked at his watch, then replied, "He was for a while, but he didn't like it. He said he didn't like the responsibility, so he asked to go back to diving. They let him because he's a damn good diver. About the same time, Exxon offered him a huge salary to become their company diving rep, but he turned them down for the same reasons."

Richard stared at Tim in disbelief.

"You can talk about him if you want, Richard, but if the shit hits the fan and I'm in the water—I hope Merle is my standby diver."

Richard sheepishly looked down at the radio set. He was aware, as if for the first time, of the bubbling, gurgling sound of Merle grinding, thirty-five feet below them.

"Go ahead and bring him up," Tim said.

"Now? Why so soon?"

"We just got a radio call about another job. It seems that Technical Division got one of their R.O.V.s tangled up not far from here and the office wants us to go over and get it untangled. You bring him up while I go tell the boat captain."

* * *

By the time they arrived at the oil rig the sun was barely above the horizon. Merle stood on the back deck drinking a cup of coffee and looking at the other work-boat. She was moored with her stern towards the oil rig, and two thick ropes held her securely in place. Perched on the back edge of the work-boat's broad, flat deck was a Bell-Bounce dive system. It was used for relatively deep dives of short duration or "bounce" dives.

The most important part of the diving system was a small, round diving bell, capable of carrying two fully equipped divers to and from an underwater job while still under pressure. In a pile beside the bell lay a 600-foot bundle of electrical wires and gas hoses appropriately called an umbilical. The umbilical supplied the diving bell with breathing gas, electric power, and communications. The bell

was temporarily connected to a large, cylinder-shaped decompression chamber. This chamber was pressurized after the dive and contained bunks where the divers could sleep or play cards while they decompressed.

There was also a large winch and hoist system for raising and lowering the diving bell, and a plywood dive shack containing depth gauges, gas control valves, and radio sets. It was from this dive shack that Tim would control tonight's dive.

Hearing the galley door slam behind him, Merle turned and saw Tim striding towards him.

"The rig is going to lower their personnel basket and lift us up and over to the other boat," Tim said. "Mike and the others have already got the bell-bounce system ready to go."

"Good deal," said Merle.

"Listen, Merle," Tim paused before continuing. "I was thinking of letting Richard go down in the bell with Mike tonight. Mike will be the one to actually get out of the bell and do the work, so it will be a good dive to break Richard in on. He can just ride down, tend Mike, and ride back. He's never made a bell dive but this should be an easy one and it'll give him a chance to learn the bell. Besides, I want you topside to get the bell in and out of the water and to act as standby diver. Okay, Merle?"

"Sure, Tim. You let all these young boys that got to make their Corvette payments get in the water tonight. I'll just stay up here on deck and make that easy money," he smiled.

* * *

Two hundred and three feet below the surface, Mike swam slowly through the blackness. With one arm sliding along the horizontal structural member and his umbilical trailing behind him, he slowly kicked his fins and swam cautiously through the darkness. His underwater light illuminated only three or four feet in front of him.

"Mike, topside. See anything yet?"

"Negative, topside. I can't see shit. I'm still swimming along this cross-

brace towards the center, over."

"Roger, understand. The technicians told me that the R.O.V. is fouled somewhere near the center of the rig, probably on the cross-bracing, over."

"Roger, topside."

Inside the diving bell Richard sat on the tiny folding seat and paid out the diver's umbilical a few feet at a time.

"Okay in the bell, Richard?" Tim asked.

"Roger, topside. How's Mike?"

"He's still searching towards the center," Tim said. He turned a small knob on the radio set which decreased the distortion in Richard's voice caused by the helium-oxygen inside the bell. Tim always made sure

"Meanwhile, in the ink-black water beneath them, Mike worked to attach the hoist wire to the R.O.V."

that he kept the diver in the bell aware of what the diver in the water was doing. Although they were less than a hundred feet apart, neither diver could talk directly to the other, but had to relay any conversation through Tim in the dive shack up above.

"Topside, I may have something." Mike stopped swimming and wrapped both of his legs around the bracing. Sitting up straight, he shined his light to the right and saw the tangled R.O.V.

"I've got it, topside."

"Roger, Mike. What's the situation, over?"

"It looks like the R.O.V.'s caught in an old rigging sling. There's wire rope everywhere and what looks like an old nylon cargo net. Whatever was in the cargo net must have fallen to the bottom a long time ago, over."

"Roger. Can you get to it, over?"

"I think so. I'm sitting on the cross-brace and most of this stuff is hanging below me. The R.O.V. is out about six feet from the brace, over."

"Roger, Mike. We're going to drop a hoist wire down to you. You shackle it to the R.O.V., and then as soon as

you're clear we can retrieve the thing, over."

"Roger, topside, understand. Tell the bell to keep my umbilical tight, there's some current down here, over."

"Roger, Mike. Sit tight."

On the back deck of the work-boat Merle stood talking to George, one of the young diver-tenders. He nodded towards the oil rig. "They're lowering the hoist wire now," he said. "I wish Mike would wrap this up so I can get out of this wet suit."

The speaker on the oil rig blared with Tim's voice, "All stop on the hoist."

Hearing that, Merle said, "He must have the wire. It won't be long now till we bring them up."

Meanwhile, in the ink-black water beneath them, Mike worked to attach the hoist wire to the R.O.V. With his leg wrapped around one of the rusty rigging wires so that he could use both hands, Mike dangled from the cross-brace. His light was taped to his forearm, enabling him to see enough to thread the shackle on the end of the wire through the hoisting ring on top of the R.O.V. and re-connect it. He jerked it to make sure that it would hold. There was some slack in the hoist wire, and, not wanting it to get fouled, Mike told topside, "Come up easy on the hoist, topside. Easy."

"Roger, Mike. Up easy on the hoist wire."

Mike watched as the hoist wire slowly began to tighten up. When there was about two feet of slack wire remaining, Mike said, "All stop on the hoist, topside."

"Roger, all stop on the hoist." The hoist wire continued to tighten.

"All stop, topside, all stop!"

"Roger, Mike, all stop." The hoist wire jerked tight, then stopped.

Mike began to unwind his leg from the rigging. He kicked backwards away from the tangled wire just as it all jerked free of the cross-bracing. Old rusted wire rope crashed down into the side of his diving helmet as several hundred pounds of wire wrapped itself about Mike's body and pulled him downward.

"Topside! Slack the diver! Slack the diver! Hold the hoist! Hold the hoist! I can't get . . ."

Inside the bell Mike's umbilical jerked out of Richard's hands and began to snake out of the bell and into the water. Richard spoke into the radio speaker, "Topside, what's he doing, over?"

Tim leaned closer to the radio set.

"Mike, what's going on?"

There was no reply.

"Mike, topside, how do you hear me?" Silence.

"Can you feel Mike on his umbilical, over?"

"In the bell, how do you read me, over?"

"Loud and clear, topside. What's Mike doing, over?"

Richard tugged sharply on Mike's umbilical. There was no answering tug. He tried again. Nothing. "Negative, topside."

"Get in the water!" Tim yelled. "I've lost communication with Mike. Get out of the bell and go down his umbilical. Let me know every move you make, over."

Merle jerked his head towards the dive shack when he heard Tim's frantic voice over the speaker on the oil rig. As he started towards the dive shack Merle grabbed George by the arm. "Stick close."

"What's up, Merle?"

"I don't know, but something is."

Tim shouted into the radio, "Richard, are you in the water yet?"

"Yes, topside, but . . . no, not yet, over."

"What the hell are you doing? I need you in the water -now!"

"I am in the water, but my umbilical is still inside the bell and it's caught on something and . . ."

"Shit!"

As Merle was about to enter the

dive shack Tim burst out of the door.

"Merle, suit up. I've lost comms with Mike."

Merle looked puzzled. "What about Richard?"

"He's fouled."

"What?"

"How the hell do I know?" Tim shouted. "He's still trying to get out of the damn bell! Listen, Merle," Tim's voice quieted, "get down there and tell me what's going on."

Tim turned to the small group gathering behind him, "Get another umbilical on the line and get it ready to pay out."

"How long you been without comms, Tim?"

"Maybe three minutes."

"Can Richard feel him moving around?"

"No. Nothing."

"What was the last thing he said before you lost comms?" Merle asked.

Michael Scheiderich



"He started screaming to slack the diver and hold the hoist wire."

While he was talking to Tim, Merle slipped his safety harness over his shoulders and buckled his weight belt. He walked to the side of the boat then, bending down, he pulled on his fins.

"Listen, Tim, at this depth if I wind up with any amount of bottom time at all it's going to take at least two hours of decompression to get me back to the surface. It'll be easier to just bring me back up inside the bell with the two of them, and then let us all decompress together inside the deck chamber. Can we all three fit inside that bell?"

"You'll have to."

A tender handed Merle the emergency umbilical to carry down to Mike. Merle would have to disconnect the communication wires going to Mike's diving helmet and reconnect the wires of the extra umbilical. Only then would they be able to talk to Mike. Merle just hoped he wasn't too late in case he also needed to hook up the breathing gas hose. Mike was wearing an emergency "bailout bottle," but it wouldn't last long at his depth.

Tim tucked the pneumofathometer hose into Merle's harness.

Merle looked down and saw that, although his voice was calm, Tim's hands were shaking. Merle swallowed the lump in his throat and tried to smile.

"Later, Tim. I got to earn my keep."

Merle turned and faced George, who was ready with his diving helmet. He ducked down as George slipped the yellow fiberglass helmet over his head and fastened it securely in place. George turned on the underwater light taped to the handle on the top of Merle's helmet.

"How do you hear me, topside?"

Tim's voice came back, "Loud and clear, Merle. How me?"

"Got you same, topside." Merle turned and faced outboard. George dropped a loop of Merle's umbilical over the side of the boat until it touched the water eight feet below. Merle tucked his chin to his chest and placed his free hand on top of his

helmet. This would keep the bottom edge of the helmet from hitting his nose when he jumped into the water. Merle leaped out away from the boat and splashed feet-first into the water.

"Diver in the water."

"Roger."

Merle kicked his feet together and popped back to the surface. He swam along the boat's hull to the stern where the bell umbilical went straight down. Merle grabbed it and began to pull himself down.

"Diver leaving the surface."

"Roger, Merle."

When his head was lower than his feet, Merle kicked his fins and plunged down toward the bottom. With the emergency umbilical in one hand and the bell umbilical in the other, Merle half-swam and half-sank towards the diving bell. As the water pressure increased, Merle swallowed and worked his jaw back and forth to equalize the pressure on his ears.

"As Merle proceeded steadily down Mike's umbilical, hand over hand, he could feel no movement at the other end."

"Okay, Merle?"

"Okay, topside." Merle exhaled deeply and felt himself sink more rapidly. Inhaling, he felt his descent slow down. As Merle's lungs filled with helium-oxygen, his rib cage expanded, increasing the physical volume of his body and thus increasing his buoyancy. He quickly exhaled and felt himself sink faster, the weight of the extra umbilical pulling him down. In the darkness, Merle hoped that he saw the bell before he hit it.

"Okay, Merle?"

"Okay, topside."

"You should be close the bell, over."

"Roger, topside. Is Richard out of the bell yet?"

"Negative, Merle. He's still fouled, over."

Merle paused before answering, "I

don't have time to rescue him, too, topside."

"Roger, Merle, I agree. Get down to Mike as soon as you can, over."

"Roger, topside." Merle slowed his descent as the diving bell loomed out of the darkness, a soft, yellow glow pouring out of the open bottom hatch. Merle worked his way down the side of the bell hand over hand. Hanging down from the hatch were two thrashing, wet-suit-covered legs and Mike's umbilical.

"At the bell, topside."

"Roger."

"Continuing down, topside."

"Roger. What's Richard doing, over?"

"Best I can tell, looks like the funky chicken, topside."

Tim squinted at the radio set.

"Say again, Merle?" he asked.

"Never mind, topside. Just keep Hollywood out of the way. Over?" Merle followed Mike's umbilical towards the oil rig. The umbilical curved downward until it crossed a large, round, horizontal structural member, then it angled down sharply. "Inside the rig, topside."

"Roger." Inside the dive shack Tim squirmed on his stool.

As Merle proceeded steadily down Mike's umbilical, hand over hand, he could feel no movement on the other end. The narrow beam of his light pierced the dark water. Then, Merle stopped. In front of him was a swaying mass of rusted wire cables, snarled hoist wire, and tangled netting. Hanging from Mike's umbilical, Merle shined his light back and forth across the tangled wires, then he saw them. Bubbles. Merle pulled himself upward along the outside of the tangled wires. He jerked aside a moss-covered mass of cargo netting and saw Mike's helmet.

Mike was hanging upside down, caught in the same steel web that had originally entrapped the R.O.V. Merle swam through the mass of rusty wires, pulling himself closer until he could see Mike's face. The faceplate of Mike's diving helmet was fogged with condensation and the oral-nasal mask inside the helmet covered all of his face except his eyes. Merle looked

into those eyes and saw helpless terror. He had seen that look in more than one diver's eyes, and he had even had it in his own. Merle held his hand in front of Mike faceplate, his thumb and index finger making a circle. Merle moved the beam of his light down Mike's arm to his hand. Mike returned the "okay" sign to Merle.

"I've got him, topside. He's okay."

"Roger, Merle, Roger. Understand diver okay. Okay. Son of a bitch." A wave of relief washed over Tim.

"His faceplate is fogged up, but it does not appear to be cracked, topside. I'm going to give him a vent, over."

"Roger, Merle. Is he injured?"

"Not that I can see, topside. He's trapped in the same rigging that fouled the R.O.V. as best I can tell, over."

"Roger, understand."

Merle reached out and fully opened the gas control valve on the side of Mike's helmet and fresh helium-oxygen began flowing through his helmet. Merle knew that when a diver panics, he breathes faster and his lungs don't remove all the carbon dioxide like they should. That allowed the carbon dioxide to build up inside his lungs and inside his helmet. Increased levels of carbon dioxide in the lungs caused rapid, heavy breathing, confusion, and an inability to think clearly. When Mike's faceplate was clear, Merle closed the gas control valve and repeated the "okay" sign. Mike returned the hand signal. Merle held his hand in front of Mike's face again and tightly clenched his fist, telling Mike to "hold."

"Topside, the comm wires on his helmet are broken off, but he appears to be okay. Do you want me to attach the extra umbilical to his helmet?"

"Merle, if you think that he's okay, then use your own judgment. If he's tangled up real bad, then it just might make things worse, over."

"I agree, topside. I think we need to get him back to the bell."

"Roger."

"Up on the extra umbilical, topside."

"Roger." When Merle felt the spare

umbilical being pulled, he held it away from his body to keep it from getting entangled, then let go. "You've got the umbilical, topside."

"Roger, Merle. I'm going to shoot a pneumo."

"Roger, Roger."

Soon, Merle felt the small air bubbles coming out the open end of his pneumofathometer hose.

"Shoot it."

"Roger, Merle. Got it." On the wall of the dive shack Merle's depth gauge read 237 feet.

"Merle, topside. Richard's freed himself and is swimming over to help you out, over."

"Are you sure he's going to help, topside?"

"Listen, Merle, I know what you're thinking, but we got a job to do here, over."

"Roger, Tim. But don't tell me—tell Hollywood."

Richard swam down to where Mike

"Every move Merle made was so studied and deliberate, he appeared to move in slow motion."

was entangled. He watched impatiently as Merle slowly removed the encrusted wires from around Mike's body. Anxious to help, Richard grabbed the netting and tried to jerk it away from Mike's body. The netting dropped down several feet, pulling Mike with it. Mike began to flail his one free arm and tried to kick his legs. Merle quickly grabbed Richard's arm to stop him. He held his clenched fist in front of Richard's faceplate.

"Topside! Tell Richard to stop!" Several strands of wire dropped around their shoulders as Merle placed himself between the other two divers. Richard tugged at the wires and began to struggle, not realizing that he was endangering them all. Merle reached out and grabbed the gas control valve on Richard's helmet and opened it. Gas bubbles exploded into the water as his helmet began to free-flow.

"Damn it, Tim! Tell this son of a bitch to stop before he traps us all!"

"Roger, Merle! Roger!"

Richard stopped struggling when his helmet began to free-flow. He turned off the gas valve so that he could hear.

"Do you hear me, Richard?"

"Roger, topside."

"All stop, Richard! I say again, all stop!"

"Roger, topside."

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm just trying to help, topside."

"Roger, understand, but just do what Merle does. Do you understand, over?"

"Roger."

Merle held up his closed fist in front of Richard's face. Richard responded with an "okay" sign.

Merle swam back to Mike and gave him an "okay" sign. Mike repeated the signal. Merle began again to slowly remove the wires from around Mike's body. He frequently shined his light on Richard to check him.

Richard kept his light on Mike and watched as Merle painstakingly untangled the other diver. Every move Merle made was so studied and deliberate, he appeared to move in slow motion. Richard began to slowly unwrap the wires draped across his own shoulders.

"Okay, Richard?"

"Okay, topside."

"Okay, Merle?"

"Yeah."

"Everything okay Merle?"

"Yeah. Now that Hollywood has calmed down. He was about to get us all in a world of hurt."

"Roger, Merle. This was a hell of a first bell dive for him, over."

"Roger. He's young. He'll get over it."

Once he freed himself, Richard began to help Merle. Together the two divers worked to get Mike untangled. Several times they were forced to stop and untangle each other before they could continue. Mike was able to help only by remaining still while the other two divers moved his arms and legs.

As he worked to free Mike, Merle figured that, somehow, when they had tightened the hoist wire, it had



pulled the R.O.V. up just enough to jerk every thing loose. Perhaps the hoist operator had taken up the slack too quickly and jerked the R.O.V. Not expecting the wire to tighten so quickly, Mike had probably been unable to kick back out of the way. The R.O.V. must have lurched and swung loose with the current, dragging Mike with it. Only by luck had Mike's umbilical been long enough not to snap in two.

"Topside, we've got him clear. Tell Richard to swim back to the horizontal cross-bracing and stop, over."

"Roger, Merle. Wait one."

Merle watched as Richard slowly nodded his helmet up and down.

Richard grabbed hold of Mike, who already had a firm grip on Merle. They kicked upwards, following their umbilicals back toward the bell, tugging Mike along between them.

"Returning to the bell, topside."

"Roger, Merle."

Once they reached the cross-bracing, Merle gave Mike the sign to "hold." Each diver grabbed the cross-brace and held on.

"Topside, at the cross-bracing. Tell Richard to wrap his legs around the rig and pull his umbilical tight, over."

"Roger, Merle. Wait one."

Soon Richard turned towards Merle and gave him the "okay" sign. He wrapped his legs around the cross-

brace and took a strain on his umbilical, pulling it tight. Merle took one of Mike's hands and placed it on Richard's umbilical. Then making a fist with his thumb stuck straight up, he moved it up and down in front of Mike's face. Mike motioned "okay" and began swimming up the slanting umbilical. Merle followed, keeping his light on Mike's back.

"Topside, Mike and I are going to the bell, over."

"Roger, Roger."

Soft yellow light poured out of the bottom hatch of the bell as Mike and Merle hung on to it, looking at each other.

"Divers at the bell, topside."

"Roger."

Merle pointed at Mike and then pointed up inside the bell. Mike gave the "okay" sign and kicked upward. Merle helped him into the bell. Soon, Mike began to pull his umbilical inside the bell.

"How is he, topside?"

"He's okay, Merle. He's says he's sore and probably has some bruises. He sounds a little shaken up but, shit, who wouldn't be? Richard is coming back to the bell, over."

"Roger."

When Richard got to the bell, Merle helped him get inside and then hung on to the bell while Richard pulled his umbilical inside.

Merle knew that his bottom time was long enough to require hours of decompression before he could safely return to the surface. It would be safer and certainly more comfortable for him to decompress inside the deck chamber with the other two divers. That meant that Tim would have no choice but to bring him back up in the bell with the other two divers.

"Merle, topside."

"Roger."

"You need to ride up in the bell, Merle. I don't think I need to tell you that, over."

"Roger, Tim, I know."

Merle stuck his head into the bell hatch. His helmet popped out of the water and he squinted his eyes in the bright light. He raised his fist over his head and knocked on his helmet.

"Get his helmet off," Mike said. He grabbed Merle's arm and held him up while Richard unlatched Merle's helmet and pulled it up and over his head.

"Hold it," said Merle, "let me unshackle." Holding on to the bell with one hand, Merle reached down and pulled the quick-release shackle that attached his umbilical to his diving harness.

"Okay—now pull it up." Richard picked up Merle's helmet and wedged it behind a carbon dioxide scrubber.

"Give me your weight belt, Merle."

Merle unsnapped the buckle on his weight belt and removed his arms from the shoulder straps as Richard pulled it up and inside the bell. Merle looked up and his eyes met Mike's. Mike's eyes were clouded with a mixture of gratitude and leftover fear, and Merle knew what he was thinking. Quickly looking away, Merle loudly cleared his throat.

"I hear you boys are opening up an underwater taxi service?"

Mike slowly smiled.

"Damn, Merle. Get your ass in here."

While Mike pulled Merle up in the bell, Richard disconnected Merle's umbilical from his helmet and dropped the umbilical out the hatch.

"Topside, take up Merle's umbilical. He's in the bell, over."

"Roger."

Mike handed Merle a damp towel.

"Boy, I sure was glad to see your ugly ass," Mike said.

Merle was drying his face and said something unrecognizable. When he pulled the towel away he noticed that Richard was blushing.

"I'm sorry, Merle. I was just trying to . . ."

"Yeah," Mike said, "what the hell took you so long?"

Richard dropped his shoulders and seemed to shrink in size. He opened his mouth but no words came out.

"I know what happened to him," Merle calmly said. The other two divers looked at him, puzzled.

"When you got ready to enter the water—you folded your seat up against the bulkhead, didn't you?"

Mike began to slowly nod his head. "How did you know that?" Richard asked.

"When the seat dropped down, it pinched your umbilical between the hinge and the bulkhead. You couldn't get any slack hose."

"That's exactly what happened! How did you . . ."

"Always leave the seat up," Merle said, "it also helps you pull yourself back in the bell."

Richard blushed again at his ignorance.

"I'm really . . ."

"I know," Merle interrupted. "Hand me your fins, let's see if we can't make some more room in here."

Mike and Merle decided that if they could move around enough to drop the inside hatch and secure it in place, then Merle could sit on top of it between the other two divers. After some squeezing and swearing, they were able to close and secure both bottom hatches. Mike re-checked the valve lineup inside the bell while Merle and Richard stuffed the two-bell umbilical and the three helmets out of the way. Merle then sat down on top of the inner hatch.

"Topside, bell is ready to leave bottom. Both hatches are secured and checklist is complete, over."

"Roger, Mike. In the bell, standby to leave bottom."

"Roger."

As the topside crew winched the bell slowly upwards, Mike and Merle looked at each other again. Mike slowly stuck out his hand. "Thanks, Merle," he whispered.

Merle nodded his head, then grabbed Mike's hand and squeezed.

Merle looked at Richard. He was sitting with his side towards the other two divers, leaning against the bulkhead. His eyes were closed and his lips were pressed tightly together.

"Hey."

Richard opened his eyes. Merle tapped Richard's wetsuit-covered knee with the back of his knuckles.

"Hey, Richard."

Reluctantly he looked at Merle.

"Lesson number one, Richard: There are old divers and bold divers, but there are no old, bold divers."

Merle extended his hand. "Understand?"

Richard managed a thin smile and shook Merle's hand. Silently the three divers rode the bell back to the surface.





Mike Goodson

Meat Powder in My Father's Eye

I have been conditioned
to smile upon the sky;
at God, and myself.
Ring the bell and watch me slobber . . .
like a mortal in need.
Pull the grip on my recliner,
let the blood rush to my face.
I need a sense of form and color;
to understand.
Read a psalm of candy apples,
crooked toes, and empty plates.
Maybe I can't comprehend
parental palms a'flying.

Enas Shonojn

Julie Meadowcraft



Beatnik

Watch out Bean
with your brown plaited hair
complete with Indian Beads and
Sunflower seeds,
Baby is driving daddy's topless car again . . .
Golden keys for a copper child
that tarnishes when the sun sets
Silver wheels for a proven heel . . .
Look how soon Daddy forgets.

Watch out Bean,
there's no place for you
in their sterling world
where love is made from diamond rings,
and peace is found in pearls.

But watch Bean,
and see who cries
when the morning comes;
for happiness doesn't stay
once the caviar is done.

Stormie Janzen



By Lein Shory

Sky paces, dark and foul and bright and beautiful and—Oh, Sweet Jesus—the cans, the cans. Presence; that's it. That's what he has. With a capital P. He's standing, and he's walking, like he could cross the Atlantic, yes sir, his eyes ablaze, hands trembling with power.

The cans, they're stacked up, stacked like a pyramid, thirty-two then sixteen then eight then four then two then one, and the light from the street-light through the window hits 'em just right to make those little golden shields glitter. Oh yes, oh yes, like gold, purity. Sir Galahad is what it's like.

Fire breathes and farts and calls to heaven like Satan. Glorious Satan and Glorious God doing a dance for us and Sky's making the music for 'em to dance to. The garbage man. Garbage man or junkman? Junkman. Listen to your junkman. Listen. Listen.

The man, my man Sky. Don't you know, don't you know. He's singing, singing, singing. That's what it is he's singing.

Taste in my mouth, long ago taste, but something accessible. Not real taste, mind you. Past taste. Memory taste. Big Mac. That secret sauce on a Big Mac.

I want a Big Mac and Sky's singing and it's just like the Round Table.

"There's a dead bum," Sky says.

"It's not," I say. The light's dancing to Sky's song and it flickers, flickers on something, a mound, a mound of something, but not a dead bum.

"That's a goddamned dead bum. I swear his eyes are gone and the sockets are filled with maggots," Sky says.

"No bum, no maggots," I tell him.

"I'll take out my fucking knife yes sir and scoop those maggots out of his eyes and make you swallow them if you don't believe me."

Me, I could see. My angle. The mound stuck out over the other. A fat bum's coat. That's what it was to Sky, from his angle. But it was a bag, and out the spilled-over end I could see and Sky couldn't dozens, hundreds of them. Styrofoam sandwich containers. Big Mac. That secret

sauce.

But where's the glory in a bag? Styrofoam? No glory, no glory like that beautiful dead bum with the maggots where his eyes should be. No glory like the glory Sky's eyes see. Best to let the glory be.

"You're right. Dead bum," I say.

"Damn right," Sky says.

Those flames rise and I think. Think about marshmallows. No Big Macs, for sure, but marshmallows, maybe? Marshmallows, they're easier, maybe, than Big Macs?

"Marshmallows, Sky," I say.

"Like a goddamn Cub Scout," he says.

"Just imagine those marshmallows," I say.

"Let's get you some fucking marshmallows," he says. "Let's find a place. We'll find a place with everything."

Then Sky ends the flickering, and the dance ends. Singing goes on, outside, where the words solidify in the air. The clean, clean cold. Out in our enchanted forest, if you like.

And Sky keeps singing, though what I don't know. Not even singing, maybe. Maybe humming. Maybe both.

"What is it, Sky?"

"What is what?"

"What's the song?"

"Song is 'Shut Your Fucking Face.'"

So I don't know the song. The singin's private, you see. Don't mess with Sky about the singin'. Either you know it or you don't.

Night rushed by, bitter and ripping. The windows and doors begged for us up and above, all of 'em with that horde of marshmallows waiting for us within, but none of 'em were right, right enough, that is, right enough for Sky, so on we went, looking for that special place, the place with everything.

So then God, done with his dancing, looks down and wrinkles the right space and the right time right onto me and Sky; and Sky, who could tell when such things were happening, suddenly stops and turns to our left, in front of a great red monstrosity, red and white and grey, knowing that behind that door and through those



windows lay the greatest accumulation of marshmallows and other delights that anyone anywhere could ever hope to find, and says, "This is the place."

Sky leads, I follow, tearing apart and reforming what was into what is.

Inside he's in he's in like a ghost walking through a wall he opens the door and it's that easy. Dark inside, dark but glitters glitter everywhere. Glitter of all the gold in the world, and the floor it's like walking on air how do they stand it how do they stand it to be perfect all the time.

Sky floats, opens opens opens. Opens fast and hard and smash and bang he opens it's the rage and the joy coursing through him, coursing through me, too many things just too many things my head hurts there are so so many things to have and take and just to touch.

So long, very long, goodbye, goodbye, Sky sings, happy and mad and tears running down his face—why can't we stay, why can't we stay the tears say. The gold on those shields was not real gold, the flames not

warmth, heat yes but not like this not like this here where no cold creeps around the corners.

There are books, books everywhere not just marshmallows but words little black lines and squiggles that go together and say things tell you about other worlds and people and places and things so many things just holding one in my hand I can feel the knowledge in it and why can't I have books yes why why I will take this one it is mine I want it it wants me it will not be missed.

"You wanted marshmallows," Sky says, scorning the book. Sky doesn't need books it's all in his head. But I'm looking at pictures and the marshmallows disappear for a while because there are brilliant beautiful pictures, swirls of blue and black and stars and flowers and flowers.

"Get up and help me find the marshmallows," Sky says.

I'm getting up and there's another rip, another change jolting like an electric shock. The door we came through opens and Mr. Trench Coat is there, eyes like bugs, looking at

us. Hair all slick, shower in Crisco it is, every little detail, so perfect, so perfect, no wrinkles, no stubble, shoes all shining.

"What the fuck?" says Mr. Trench Coat. "Thieves! Trying to rip me off!"

"Marshmallows!" Sky demands, words crashing through the air like missiles. Sky follows his words, crashes for real. "Where are the GODDAMNED MARSHMALLOWS?"

"No marshmallows for fucking scumbags," the enemy the black knight the dragon, Mr. Trench Coat says.

Then I see the slicer in Sky's hand; the silver sharp glittery Slicer. Me and Sky and the Slicer—the Three Musketeers, Sky says.

"Cut you till you tell," Sky says. Slicer laughs through the air, hungry.

"No cutting here, no sir," says the enemy and he's gone, back into the black. He had been gliding past us, speaking, gliding between me and Sky, on that carpet so plush. Wouldn't you just die to sleep on it and they fucking just walk they've got beds for sleeping.

"Fucking cut you!" says Sky, pursuing into the black. But the black isn't the way to go not unless the black is yours and this time the black definitely isn't Sky's and it opens its mouth and receives him readily like Tom the Cat receiving Jerry the Mouse into his hungry jaws and I see and feel this as it happens and can even feel those fangs of the black brush against me feel its hot breath but I don't say anything and what could I say anyway Sky does what he does and never mind me.

And then there's this unholy crack like a little piece of hell and heaven mixing together like thunder and lightning. You can stand still and let it pulse through you; you can hear the sound, you really can. Overlook the pain in the ears and it's beautiful in a way, like "Starry Night," like the picture in the book in my hand that falls when I hear that sharp crack. Harsh and deadly and insane but beautiful.

But there's no time for thinking about that because I'm right here and not distant in a museum feeling something already done. I'm moving, and the carpet isn't so plush now the palace not so glittery. That sound, it bends things, changes things.

Sky, it's changed directly. I'm in the black but the black is ignoring me while it eats. It's eating Sky. Eating Sky. The black is eating Sky. I know from the big hole where his heart was, because I can see all that glory spilling out onto the carpet.

Slicer's in his hand, quiet. Sky's singin', singin' something and to what I don't know, can't hear the words, can't really tell or see or know much of anything. Head hurts and I'm drowning in the black. Then I hear it.

"So long, very long, goodbye, goodbye, listen, he's singin', singing."

And Mr. Trench Coat is still there, holding that thing that brings the fire in his hand, hungry, smoking, shaking I see his hand is shaking all dressed up but no guts inside.

"You get out or you'll get yours," he says, voice shaking too.

All of a sudden it's on me, a flash before my legs give, it rescues me,

holds me up, gives me the glory. I'm watching, not really doing. Take Slicer out of Sky's hand, and then move like hunger, toward Mr. Trench Coat, and stab and stab and stab and twist and the other the enemy the dragon yes the dragon that's it or the black knight maybe the black knight Mr. Trench Coat anyway crumbles full of new holes gushing like Niagara Falls. Can't stop myself stab more more and more. Slicer is hungry. I'm hungry.

Finally it leaves me, legs give, fall in between the red draining dripping life of Sky, red draining dripping life of Mr. Trench Coat.

"Oh, Sky . . ."

*"It's eating Sky. Eating Sky.
The black is eating sky."*

He's shaking, just a little. He's not much there now. Then he's gone. No words, just gone. King Arthur, on his way to Avalon; that much I know. Slicer is mine now, to guard and protect and to use against the evil. Much evil is done tonight.

I want to move Sky help him away from here. No place to die.

"No place to die," I say, but Sky isn't hearin'.

Can't take him cause he'll kill me too. They'll come soon, I know. With their voices and hats and paper and pens and sticks and they'll shout things at me and tell me things all their word games and then won't you know I'll be dead too. They'll scrape up Sky like a fucking dog and handle old dead gushing fucking Mr. Trench Coat delicately like he's a fucking saint gone to Heaven.

So Sky stays and I'm gone—grabbing the book as I go, bloody fingerprints staining the perfection—I'm gone, through the black and into the light and down the stairs and out into the cold and the blood that kept me so warm is like ice in the night wind.

It all rushes by and there's no more glory lingering tonight no time to find it anyway. Eyes are watery and blurred with wind in them and I look up and can tell it's clear and see the stars and

through the water and the wind they look just like "Starry Night" in the book clutched to my side.

Inside it's cold but not as cold and the wind doesn't blow except for a draft. I put the book down, fall; down on the floor. Can feel my heart against my rib cage, trying to break free. Got as much chance as I do. Clutch the ground like it'll take me back and protect me, but it's cold, cold as the outside.

Could run, but no reason. They'll find me. Never find me, never care before but they'll find me now, yes sir. Sky would've known, Sky would've known what to do.

It hurts but I move, get up. Sit down on a turned-over paint can. Start the fire. No marshmallows. All this and no marshmallows. Just to have those marshmallows over that fire, watch 'em get black, and pull 'em off the stick and see the line of marshmallow goo between the stick and the marshmallow, put in your mouth, tastes like heaven, cooked by hell. And Sky's gone.

The dead ain't a dead bum no more, never was. Plastic bag full of sandwich containers. The beer cans don't shine, all the glitter gone.

Just a shitty place to be, is all. Shitty place to be in the cold.

The book won't do me any good. No point in having any book. Sky knew. Flip through the pages, try to see with the flame, hard to make out detail. Heavy, thick brush strokes, not real, but more real than real. Dandelions are alive, stars are glowing harshly, wood and grass and faces like you could touch them. Like you could touch the pain.

Not a damn bit of good, the book. What I need is marshmallows. I rip up the book, page by page, toss them on the flames, watch "Starry Night" go black and curl up and be eaten by the black, and wait.

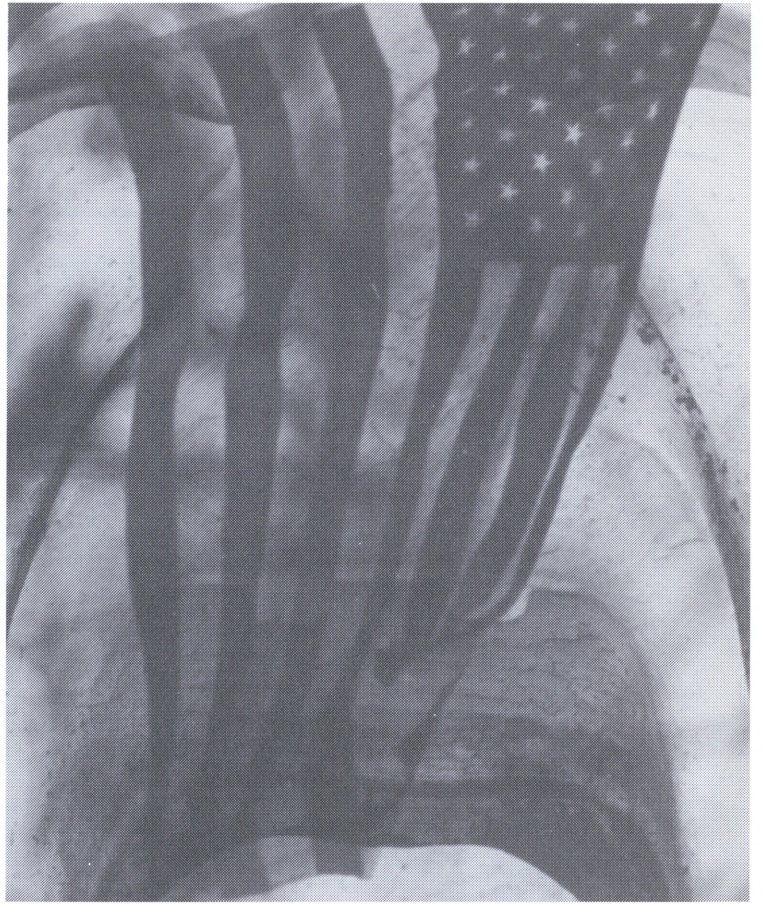


Todd Keith



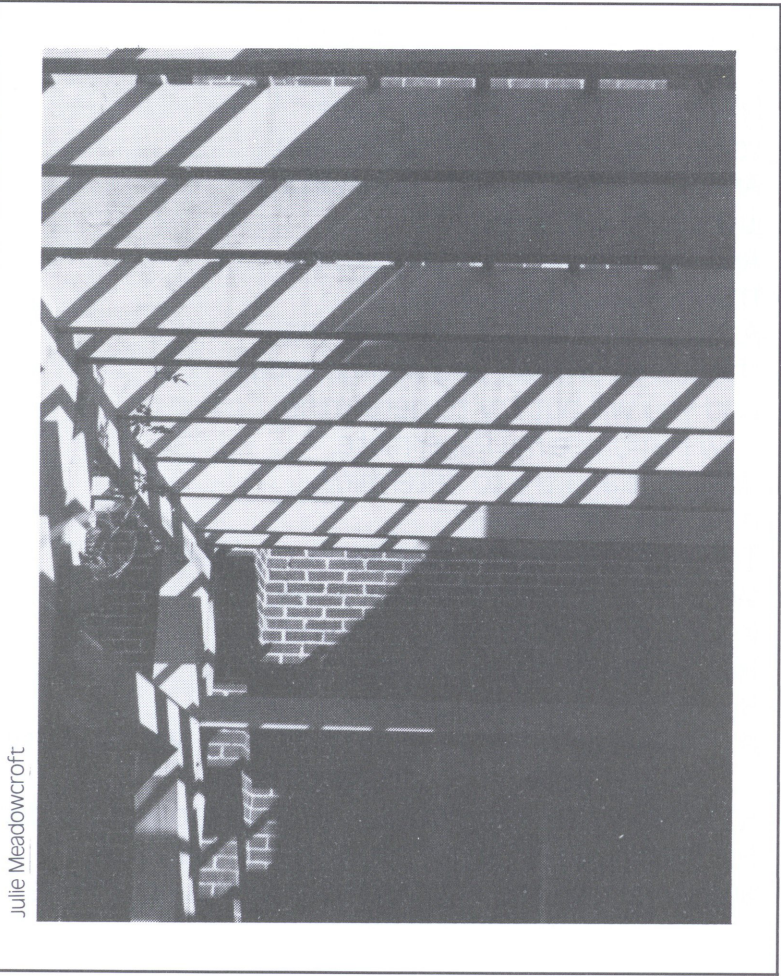
Closing Shots

Brian Thompson



Evan Hanby





Julie Meadowcroft

A Word From the Poet

I have adequate time and space
to put these words upon this pulp.
And if I choose I'll make a palindrome;
just to freak you out.
And you will but try to determine
the meaning of my usage.
And you will but try to determine
the scents of flesh, and orange soda.
And you will but try to determine
how I embrace my Papermate.
While I sit and try to determine
how you stay amused.
These are just letters that taunt my brain;
symbols of donuts, and bicycle sex.
In fact, they don't mean a damn thing
Hell, I can't even spell veracity.
But still you sweat and lick these pages,
as if they can bring you a sense of sixty-watt stability
. . . All the while I sit in a state of flux.
So utilize your own confusion to sit in sap and ponder.
For I refuse to entertain you with my inequities,
and I won't be immortalized by four legs on a stone.

Enas Shonojin

Contributors

Joseph Brandon is a local eccentric who is compiling a history of Indo-European languages and has this area's most impressive butterfly collection.

David Brooks is a senior majoring in English and history from Seminole, Florida.

Simmons B. Buntin is a senior in political science from Ocala, Florida.

Patrick Cassady is a visual arts major from St. Petersburg, Florida. He enjoys drawing, sports, and youth activities at the Wesley Foundation.

Rhonda Cunningham is a senior in psychology who is currently writing a Christian self-help book combining religion and psychology.

Robin Dare is a senior in journalism from Buffalo, New York, who was on active duty in the navy for several years and has been in the reserves for the past ten years. Her hobbies include swimming, reading, and restoring cars with her husband. She works for the Lee County Humane Society on weekends.

Todd Deery is a senior in English from Maitland, Florida.

Karin Fecteau, a junior in visual arts, is also known as the local designated driver. Her highlight of the day is getting the mail. She would like to go to the Flush but it's got too many calories.

Stephanie Frey is a junior in visual arts from Conyers, Georgia, who bases most of her art works on the human figure.

Charles R. Gaston, Jr., is a junior from Brentwood, Tennessee, who is majoring in English.

Janet Gonzales is an architecture major who spent her summer in Europe and her fall quarter working at the architecture studio in Birmingham, Alabama. She plans to return to Europe this spring.

Mike Goodson has been a photographer for eight years. He is currently doing freelance work, figures, still lifes, portraits, and commercial work. He was co-author and director of photography for the book *Tiger Walk to Victory*. He is a senior in visual design from Hamilton, Alabama.

Evan Hanby is a senior in English from Montgomery, Alabama, and is editor of *THE CIRCLE*.

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Steve Holley is a former oil field diver who is now acquiring a dual degree in building science and architecture.

Steve Hubbs is from Thomasville, Alabama, and is an illustration major.

Stormie Janzen is a freshman majoring in psychology. Her hobbies include collecting sand-filled vodka bottles from around the world and re-defining words such as "baseball" and "sushi" (personal joke).

Jenny M. Jurjevich is a junior from Bay Minette, Alabama, majoring in both English and art, who enjoys drawing celebrity portraits.

Todd Keith is a senior in English from Birmingham, Alabama. He enjoys coaching a local youth soccer team in his free time.

Julie Meadowcroft is a senior in illustration and visual arts from Dunwoody, Georgia.

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John Sease is from Montgomery, Alabama, and is majoring in architecture.

Enas Shonojn (nice name, Sean) is a senior in biology from Atlanta, Georgia, who is studying the mating habits of college freshmen.

Lein Shory is a senior in English from Birmingham, Alabama. He has nothing more to say.

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Scott Smith is a senior majoring in English from Huntsville, Alabama.

Eddie Story is from Athens, Alabama, and is a senior in finance. Adventuring is his favorite hobby and also serves as the source for most of his photographs.

Mary Jo Sumner is a junior in architecture.

Bryan Thompson is another elusive contributor.

Diana Webb is a native Auburnite and a current PhD student. She has had several works published in both national and regional magazines addressing topics concerning animal rights. She uses a pseudonym to prevent retribution against her own pets by those who disagree with her ideas.

Steve Winslett is a senior in illustration from Tallassee, Alabama.

